

CREATIVE WORK:  
**“THE QUEEN OF BEDLAM”**

EXEGESIS:  
**“GENRE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE OF GENRE FICTION: A TIGHTROPE IN  
THE DARK.”**

By  
Launz Burch, B.Sc.

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

University of Tasmania, July 2015

**Declaration of Originality:** This work contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the work, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the work, nor does the work contain any material that infringes copyright. SIGNED: 09-11-2015

**Authority of Access:** This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying and communication in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968. SIGNED:

09-11-2015

**Acknowledgments:** This work was made possible by the kind guidance of my supervisor, Dr Robert Clarke whose insights, broad experience and boundless patience allowed me to move quickly to the heart of the question. The man is a legend. Many thanks go to Dr Danielle Wood, my second supervisor, for anchoring the far end of the State and keeping the tigers at bay, as well as for her astute reflections on my poetic voice. I'd also like to acknowledge Dr Michael Powell for being a crusty old curmudgeon and insisting I do this; and my wife Natalie, for being very patient indeed.

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge George Gordon, Lord Byron. I wrote a little over thirteen thousand words of *ottava rima* poetry for this project, and I did so with the aid of a word processor, dictionaries, thesauruses, and online rhyming resources. It took me several long months of concentration and mental struggle.

Byron's *Don Juan* is close to *a hundred and twenty thousand* words. He did it in 1815/16, more or less – with a quill pen.

Frankly, it's no wonder people thought he was mad.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT – Theory of Genre and the Practice of Genre Fiction: A Tightrope In The Dark .....	1
Synopsis -- <i>The Queen of Bedlam</i> .....	2
Introductory Notes on the Poem .....	4
CREATIVE WORK – THE QUEEN OF BEDLAM .....	6
EXEGESIS – “THEORY OF GENRE AND THE PRACTICE OF GENRE FICTION: A TIGHTROPE IN THE DARK.” .....	64
Introduction: Why “Genre Fiction”, Anyway? .....	65
1. Picking A Genre And Choosing The Theory .....	70
2. Looking Behind The Curtain: The Wizards of Genre .....	78
3. Fishing For An Audience .....	83
4. The Business Of Genre Is Business .....	87
5. Business Isn’t Everything. ....	92
6. Genre In Fiction: It’s Bigger On The Inside... ..	97
7. Theory To Practice: A-Roving With Byron Once More. ....	105
APPENDIX: About Steampunk .....	111
A History Of Alternate Histories .....	120
Steampunk: a core reading list .....	123
WORKS CITED .....	126

**ABSTRACT – Theory of Genre and the Practice of Genre Fiction: A Tightrope in The Dark**

I set out to understand genre by reading from the theory, but ultimately this project came to demonstrate the synergies between practice and theory, and the necessity for a writer to be conscious of those synergies. My interest in genre arose from the simple fact that I am a writer of genre-driven fiction, and faced by a marketplace destabilized by new publishing and distribution technologies, I wanted to understand what it meant to engage with the genres of my choice. Reading genre theory alone proved insufficient to describe genre as it is understood in the popular fiction community. A more complete description of genre was obtained by invoking reader/reception theory and interpretive communities, and by examining texts in sociology and post-modernism which considered the implications of genre as a commercial concept.

The breadth of theory necessary to encompass the idea of genre in popular fiction suggests that the writing of such fiction is not a simple exercise. Evidence points to the need for a writer to have an individual and highly detailed *theory of pastiche* derived from, and closely aligned with, their chosen genre. This theory must incorporate not only elements of style and tropes from the genre, but must reflect a knowledge of the aesthetic, political, and ethical regimes of value that are reflected in the work and the institutional and industrial contexts within which a given genre or sub-genre is produced, consumed, and critiqued.

This understanding of pastiche led directly to the development of the creative piece associated with this research. I chose to work within the steampunk genre, and wrote a poem that is a pastiche of Byronic poetry, designed to add complexity, depth and backstory to a forthcoming steampunk novel. The poem, following the theory explored in the exegesis, is a

genre-guided pastiche designed to illustrate the way in which a theoretical understanding of genre can both shape a work for its intended audience, and extend the boundaries of the genre itself.

### **Synopsis -- *The Queen of Bedlam***

*The Queen of Bedlam* is a narrative poem in *ottava rima*, a form made famous by George Gordon Byron in *Don Juan*. The use of *ottava rima* is a nod to Byron who appears pseudonymously in *The Queen of Bedlam* in the role of the character “Harold.” The poem tells the story of Maeve, the last Fairy Queen and her decades-long imprisonment inside the walls of Bethlem Hospital under three generations of Doctors Monroe – men who, in the role of Chief Physician, did much to build the reputation that made Bethlem a byword for cruelty and madness. Trapped by dark magic, Maeve contrives to hide herself and to be forgotten by the outside world until she can find someone to take her place – a young man of Fairy blood. Unfortunately, young Harold is beguiled by the discovery of his Fairy power, and instead of freeing Maeve he strives to return England to its former, magical state.

Meanwhile, the last Doctor Monroe – Thomas, the Iron Doctor – discovers Maeve, and sets about destroying the Bedlam Court to capture her and study her powers. Harold intervenes to defend her, but he is overpowered and saved only by Queen Maeve herself who is killed by the Iron Doctor’s machines, banishing fairy magic from earth for all time.

*The Queen of Bedlam* is intended to serve as an adjunct to a steampunk novel of the same name. It utilises a range of common steampunk tropes including romance and arcane science, and calls on a number of themes important to the steampunk genre including questions of female social roles, industrialization, and personal honour. It is furthermore a deliberate pastiche of Byron, acknowledged as such, thus underscoring the issue of pastiche

which is central to the theoretical underpinnings of this study. While the poem is intended to be broken up and distributed through the novel as chapter-headers, it nevertheless stands on its own, offering readers of steampunk both a unique challenge, and an additional path to the desired qualities of suspension of disbelief and narrative immersion.

### **Introductory Notes on the Poem**

Presentation of the poem within the context of a research paper creates some difficulty, as the poem as seen here in its full and final form will be used very differently for publication.

While it must serve here as the creative element of the paper, in order to authentically enact its relationship to the theoretical elements discussed in the exegesis it is necessary for it to be delivered quite differently to the steampunk community.

I envision that the full poem will be presented as a “found manuscript”. There will be a simple introduction to the novel that the poem is supposed to work with, stating that I received the original MS in a box of antique papers from a friend in Venice who knows of my interest in both Venice, and Byron. With some effort, the introduction will say, I have transcribed the original piece and added glosses to help modern readers understand it. While I have no direct evidence the piece is by Byron, it uses the ottava rima form, and both the language and the events depicted suggest an encounter between Byron himself and the famous Bedlam asylum in 1815. The story which unfolds in the poem is the inspiration for the novel itself.

Within the novel, portions of the poem will provide chapter-headers to offer a glimpse of the long backstory and to add a layer of verisimilitude that will help reader immersion. The poem as a whole will be available in the form shown here either as downloadable content, or as an inexpensive chapbook, or possibly even as an appendix to the novel if the publisher desires it. The long form of the poem deliberately recalls older-style poetic collections, complete with explanatory side-bar glosses, further enhancing the immersive experience.

This concept of the immersive experience is vital. The poem is not intended as a perfect pastiche of Byron’s work. It is presented as a means of supporting and enhancing the novel. It



draws on concepts from Victorian fiction including the “found MS” to allow readers the opportunity to suspend their disbelief and accept the possibility of an alternate “steampunk” history in which Byron plays a crucial role. By offering the piece as a “possible abandoned draft of Byron”, perhaps dictated to a secretary, questions of authentication and exacting style are circumvented. Meanwhile, the faux-scholarly presentation and the explanation that the poem – whatever its true origins – supplied inspiration for the novel allow readers familiar with steampunk (or even with Byron’s work) to appreciate an added layer of complexity within the work itself.

**CREATIVE WORK – THE QUEEN OF BEDLAM**

## The Queen of Bedlam

### CANTO I

When all the world was young, great marvels walk'd  
 The broad earth o'er, a wild and dreadful place.  
 Thus Artemis her Attic mountains stalk'd  
 And Olympus quailed before Zeus' stern face;  
 The very stones beneath Poseidon rocked  
 And warlike Ares father'd the might of Thrace.  
 Aye, some would call these fearful beings 'gods',  
 And claim they raised up Man from earthen clods.

They wandered o'er that younger earth at will,  
 Strew'd tales like dragon's teeth in their wake.  
 Meaning no mortal either good or ill,  
 All their mighty deeds wrought for their own sake.  
 Their smallest whims oft raised the poet's quill,  
 The hero's sword, the maiden's heart – to break!  
 For to creatures of such Titanic fame  
 The lives of men are but a petty game.

E'en unto these rainswept isles they came  
 Roving the grey hills, the greenwoods deep.  
 Our forefathers gave them many a name  
 Now lost, for such are mickle hard to keep  
 When Father Time his rightful meed doth claim  
 Deliv'ring all men unto lasting sleep.  
 For who can hope to keep alive the past  
 When each must go beneath the earth at last?

*Mickle – a Scots term  
 meaning roughly 'great  
 amounts' or 'in large  
 quantity'.*

Yet it seems that e'en Titans have an end  
 Shadow'd and uncertain, 'tis true, but still;  
 These triumphant centuries of Man must lend  
 Strength to that belief, or at least until  
 Some storied wonder comes forth to ascend  
 In glory, to rule – or perhaps to kill.  
 After all, to the elephant what boots  
 It if the mouse be trampled underfoot?

Still the world is wide. Mayhap some far land  
 Of fabled realms, like the high Hindoo Kush  
 Or ancient, shadow-haunted Samarkand;  
 Yet makes a home for mighty beings such  
 As those of long-lost legend. Understand:  
 Though Albion's a fair land, green and lush  
 So many millions teem her shores today  
 'Tis no surprise her gods have turn'd away.

The last such nonpareil in Britain dwelt  
 Not centuries past, but a few short years  
 Agone. While of Scotland she came, no Celt  
 Was she. Last of the fairy kind, her peers  
 Long since vanished. By many, 'tis felt  
 Their flight was no loss, but I greatly fear  
 Mankind's future will be hopeless, tragic  
 With no leavening of sweet Fay magic.

Maeve was the name of the last fairy queen;  
 A queen without a country, for in Bedlam  
 Was she prison'd, until eighteen fifteen,  
 Cruelly bound by one of the Monro clan.  
 Not the vile Doctor Thomas, lately dean  
 Of that benighted hell, but a quondam  
 Chief Physician, his grandsire James  
 No man more deserv'd of Infernal flames.

*Queen Maeve – a recurring figure of Celtic myth. As a Queen of the Tuatha de Danaan, she features in the tales of Cuchulainn of Ireland, for example.*

They met upon the shores of Cromarty Firth  
 Where the dour North Sea growls and shows its teeth.  
 He thought her a young maid, alive with mirth  
 Lissome, lovely, her beauty like a wreath  
 Of wildflowers, rarest of all the earth.  
 Her hair, her eyes, her breast – aye, and beneath!  
 All this the handsome lecher's eyes took in.  
 He proffered his hand, and made a satyr's grin.

“Sblood,” quoth he, “What star hath fled from heaven?  
 For surely 'tis a splendid jewel of night  
 Before me here. May I die unshriven  
 If e'er I have beheld so fair a sight.”  
 It was his habit his words to leaven  
 With sweet whispers that a comely maid might  
 Hark to. Displaying thus his manly charms  
 That he might persuade her into his arms.

*'Sblood – archaic curse or  
 oath, shortened from  
 “God's Blood”*

Yet no blushing, virginal maid was Maeve  
 Rather a mighty queen of ancient race  
 Loved o'er centuries by great men, and brave;  
 Adored by bards and poets, full of grace.  
 This James Monro seemed but a very knave  
 A bumpkin, reaching far above his place.  
 She thought at first his squalid schemes to thwart  
 Then check'd herself. Perhaps she'd make some sport!

For in truth, she'd wandered long and alone  
 A-roving the wildwoods, the beasts and birds  
 All the companionship that she might own.  
 Deep inside her, she hunger'd for some words  
 Of comfort, and merriment, some light shone  
 In the long dark; a cup from the vineyards.  
 To be the last of your kind is trying,  
 While short-lived mortals insist on dying.

So with a pretty smile she turned her head  
 And in a voice of sweet music she spoke.  
 “Grace to you good sir, and good health,” she said  
 “A shepherdess am I, of simple folk.  
 Seeking here for my flock, which lately stray'd.”  
 And here, she gathered 'round herself a cloak  
 Made play as if she suffered from the cold  
 To see if this bumpkin might grow more bold.

Say this for James Monro; he was not slow  
 To act upon an opportunity.  
 "Eventide is nigh, and the sun hangs low  
 In the west. Lady, please, my cloak," said he.  
 "'Tis of finest fleece, and quite warm, I throw."  
 The garment doffed, he made a leg – most pretty.  
 No earthly cold can harm a fairy queen  
 But Maeve took it, and smirk'd to see him preen.

"A gentleman such as yourself is rare  
 As an honest man in parliament,  
 And more welcome withal," she said. With care  
 She donned his fine, dark, woollen cloak, and went  
 Upon her way, as if to leave him there,  
 Though 'tis certain 'twas never her intent.  
 Monro, recking nothing of her wiles  
 Would have followed her a thousand miles.

"The hour grows late," said he, "Night comes apace.  
 Permit me, please, to play your gallant squire  
 And see you safely from this lonely place."  
 Maeve gazed long upon him, her eyes sapphire  
 Pools, dreaming on the snow-plains of her face,  
 And Monro felt as if he caught afire.  
 For such is the strength of fairy glamour  
 Inciting the soul to lustful clamour.

"Milord, I fear my house is poor, and far,  
 Unfit for a fine man such as thou art,"  
 Maeve said, but then Monro saw the first star  
 Of ev'ning in her eyes, and would not part  
 For all the gold of Russia's mighty Tsar;  
 Swore there and then she'd be his true sweetheart.  
 He was a man inclined to take a chance  
 And thought himself a master of romance.

*Throw – archaic verb  
 meaning to believe, or to  
 assert as truth.*

*Made a leg – an archaic  
 phrase describing a  
 flourishing bow made with  
 one leg forward.*

*...an honest man in  
 parliament – while this isn't  
 the dialogue one expects of  
 a fairy queen, it certainly  
 reflects both Byron's  
 humour and his opinions.*

*Recking – knowing, or  
 being aware of.*

*Glamour – the modern  
 word is derived from this  
 archaic term which meant a  
 magical illusion, usually of  
 beauty.*

With cunning wiles she led him ever on  
 'Til silver moonrise found them in a wood  
 Where grew a velvet, mossy bed upon  
 Which ardent lovers might lay, if they should  
 Seek sport. There, until pearl-jewelled dawn  
 Her sweet face unveil'd 'neath night's ebon hood  
 The twain explored Eros' kingdom wide.  
 Then Monro, ungallant, slept while Maeve sigh'd.

(For ever such has been the woman's lot;  
 In striving Venus' silken arts to prove.  
 Men will take their pleasures without a thought  
 For gentler ends, or honey'd words of love.  
 While Eve's daughters have yearn'd after and sought  
 The tender heart's more precious, inward trove.  
 Thus every swiving is a battle play'd  
 Betwixt knight with lance, and unconquer'd maid.)

Unslaked, Maeve look'd on Monro with ire.  
 His rough mien and unshav'd jaw by daylight  
 Sparked within her breast no urgent fire;  
 In sleep, his apparent charms seem'd but slight  
 And in the hollow left by lost desire  
 She found a wish to make some merry spite.  
 What chastisement could she most ably work  
 On this villain, who'd used her like a Turk?

Fairy malice is an uncanny thing  
 Well known from ancient song and story  
 Raised up Cuchulainn higher than a king  
 And dashed him, though he died in glory;  
 Near damned poor Tam Lin, but love's sweet sting  
 Sav'd him, when his Janet held her quarry,  
 Laid on Thomas that weary burden Truth  
 A jest both subtle and wicked, in sooth.

*Used her like a Turk –  
 Byron had considerable  
 interest in the Turks  
 himself, but the Turkish  
 ways were regarded by the  
 English as terribly  
 libidinous and licentious.  
 The writer here may not  
 actually be referring to  
 sodomy, but Regency  
 readers would have  
 understood some form of  
 debauched or 'unnatural'  
 sexual acts to be implied.*

*Cuchulainn, Tam Lin and  
 Thomas the Rhymer are  
 all well-known figures of  
 Scots and Irish myth. All  
 three fell afoul of the fairy  
 folk, although in  
 Cuchulainn's case they  
 were known as the Tuatha  
 de Danaan.*

Thus the bitter Maeve regarded Monro  
 Lying 'midst the ferns, lost in gentle sleep.  
 "By my blood," said she, "I shall work him woe,  
 Who holds a maiden's loving heart so cheap.  
 Words of false love he spake, his seed to sow.  
 By my will and art, 'tis Love he shall reap."  
 (If you wonder to hear love made a curse  
 I do envy you, for I know none worse!)

Then prick'd she her finger upon a thorn  
 A ruby drop rose on her snowy skin.  
 To those lips whose misfortune she had sworn  
 She then let it fall, saw it trickle in.  
 Rising, she left the object of her scorn  
 Asleep. She had no further want of him.  
 How little then the fairy Maeve did know  
 What she would suffer of the clan Monro!

For this James Monro was doctor and sage  
 A man of knowledge occult and arcane  
 Who had learn'd the stars of a Persian mage  
 And much Alchemy, though he did not deign  
 To take up robes, or stand upon the stage  
 As did John Dee, and other men who feign'd  
Gramarye. Folly 'tis that cries aloud;  
 True wisdom is silent, yet e'er unbowed.

Awakening then, upon the fragrant heath  
 Monro knew nothing of Maeve's vengeful stroke  
 Merely found himself lying underneath  
 The arching limbs of a grandfather oak  
 Alone; for Maeve herself had taken leave  
 Abandoning even his woollen cloak.  
 No thief was Maeve, to Monro's great surprise  
 Who thought her base-born, though with pretty eyes.

*Doctor John Dee – chief  
 astrologer to Queen  
 Elizabeth I, and reputed  
 sorcerer.*

*Gramarye – variant  
 spelling of an archaic term  
 which meant 'learned  
 knowledge', usually of some  
 magical kind. The modern  
 word 'grammar' is derived  
 of the same roots.*



In days that passed, Monro swiftly found  
Himself in thoughts of Maeve, and at a loss  
To understand how came the heart-deep wound  
He felt, recalling their night on the moss.  
Strove to forget her, but quickly he own'd  
Himself deep mired in uncouth pathos.  
For what's more tragic than a lecher who  
Finds that he can no longer say 'adieu'?

Unable to forget, he sought her out  
Along the chill shores of Cromarty Firth  
Through Millbuie wood, and the lands about.  
Yet it seemed she'd vanished off the Earth  
Until Monro himself began to doubt  
The truth of his tattered mem'ries worth.  
His heart thus lost to romance most tragic  
Monro call'd upon a darker magic.

What cunning arts he used I cannot say,  
Harking from a future so far remov'd.  
Such secrets as were known in Monro's day  
Are forgotten, or now to Science prov'd.  
Observe but this: it was another way  
Than most knew, and by his peers much unlov'd.  
Savants who practised at Monro's games  
Oft found their end in holy Roman flames.

Therefore by pursuit of forbidden art  
Monro his fearful fate did straitly scry.  
Like a dagger piercing unto his heart  
There seemed little he might do, save die.  
To live unrequited? He could not start.  
His very soul wept bitterly, and sigh'd.  
Yet 'tis in the darkest hour of night  
A man most able is to see faint light.

A-searching amongst his clothes Monro went  
 Hoping for his cloak of good wool to find.  
 Plucked it forth by the lingering sweet scent  
 Of the fairy woman for whom he pined,  
 The glorious hours they together spent  
 Still fresh and urgent in his accurs'd mind.  
 He look'd close upon it, was nigh despair  
 Then found a single, lambent, golden hair.

"Enough," quoth Monro. "This will serve my ends.  
 If I must be bound to her, likewise then  
 Shall she be bound to me. What heaven sends  
 Upon we two shall be endured. I ken  
 Not how I may make to her my amends  
 Yet I must chain her in the land of men."  
 For love of Fairy is uncommon bad  
 And when unrequited, must send men mad.

So saying, Monro took the golden hair  
 Plucked forth an ebon brother from his head,  
 Knotted them about each other and there  
 Drew from his finger tip one drop, so red  
 Trembling, slow, he touched it to the place where  
 The hairs cross'd. Drawing breath, the magus said:  
 "Blood to blood, and thus bound shall ever be  
 Soul to soul, and in like wise she to me."

Thus with blood Maeve did curse this James Monro  
 And with blood the magus his answer made.  
 Unwitting both, they wrought the world such woe  
 As not all Satan's hosts in battle array'd  
 Might hope by vile striving to allow.  
 The ends of their magics must now be said:  
 As this mortal world descends into night  
 Know that this pair snuff'd the last hope of light.

Yet wait; to ev'ry thing its proper time  
The tale still is far from fully run  
This sorry smatt'ring of metre and rhyme  
Has many a league yet ere we are done.  
My lay of love and ancient, occult crime  
Of Clotho's most enduring threads is spun.  
Tis a tragedy of a hundred years  
That starts with love, but ends with bitter tears.

Cursed with love of Maeve the fairy queen  
Monro bound her unto his iron will  
Yet by cunning arts she remained unseen  
Concealed, like her brethren 'neath the hills.  
Not a glimpse of her most alluring mien  
Could Monro discover, and yet he still  
Pined for her love, and ached deep in his heart  
Wherein Fay magic had lodged Cupid's dart.

Long he sought her, searching hither and yon  
Maeve following close as any shadow.  
Monro, unsuspecting, thought her long gone  
Yet how? The lovelorn magus could not know.  
He grew bitter, sore of heart, pale and wan,  
But kept the twin hairs which prison'd Maeve so.  
Though perhaps he'd failed the Fay to cage  
He hoped the spell might turn aside her rage.

Entrapp'd she was by his devilish art  
But no man, how ever puissant he be  
May ensnare the capricious fairy heart  
That knowing no master, is ever free.  
For love, you must know, is a thing apart  
Ancient magic within, true and holy  
Monro his will upon Maeve's flesh might prove  
But he own'd no art to command her love.

Behold the wretch! Behold the sorry knave!  
 No comfort anywhere could Monro find  
 Until at last, his very wits to save  
 He turn'd to study healing of the mind  
 Galen he read, and Hippocrates. Grave  
 Aristotle, Criton, and all such kind.  
 For a chirurge cures with his incision  
 Yet what scalpel may dissect a vision?

*Chirurge – an archaic term for a surgeon or medical doctor. All the names in this stanza are famed ancient masters of medicine.*

Tho' long this Monro sought after heart's ease  
 The Fay's potent glamour he could not mend.  
 Scented her perfume on each summer breeze  
 Imagin'd her each dawn, and at day's end  
 Heard her laughter in the whispering trees  
 He pray'd each night her silken touch to send.  
 At last, in fear of his mis'able life  
 Desperation drove him to take a wife!

(For this is how the common man must slake  
 his yearnings. Love's a rarity, with price  
 Too high for most, who instead meekly take  
 What little they can reach. The divine spice  
 of love oft falls unto the rogue or rake  
 For whom 'tis not a treasure, but a vice.  
 Love's true cost must assuredly beggar kings  
 Turning even Croesus' ilk to starvelings.)

Nigh convinc'd his tryst with Maeve was a dream  
 Monro strove to lose himself in his work.  
 By this time, he measur'd amongst the cream  
 Of doctors, wise as any learned Turk  
 His success assured, or so 'twould seem  
 For he was clever and he did not shirk.  
 He even put his native lands behind  
 To change his fortune for a better kind.

*Learned Turk – during the medieval period, the Arabic lands such as Persia kept or rediscovered much of mathematics, science and philosophy lost in the West with the fall of Rome. Even in the Regency era, they still retained a reputation for deep knowledge and mysticism.*

In Albion, his cunning won him fame  
 And wealth, his talents greatly in demand.  
 By dint of study and work, his good name  
 Spread far, with tales of his skilful hand.  
 Thus it was that in proper time he came  
 To Bethlem, where he swiftly took command.  
 And though 'tis certain this Monro meant well  
 Bedlam became another name for Hell.

Two statues stood guard over Bedlam's gate  
Of Mania and of Melancholy  
 Were they. In hopes that he might change his fate  
 Monro took the magic hairs unholy  
 Placed them beneath, as if to rest in state,  
 The great stone left hand of Melancholy.  
 Quoth he, "Now let these cursed things here lie  
 And these tormenting visions at last die!"

## CANTO II

O let us now speak on that accursed pile  
 Of stone, and tears, and all too oft-shed blood  
 Constructed but a very little while  
 Past in St George's Field. Once it stood  
 In Moorfields. This hospice, much revil'd  
 Was founded for the health and greater good.  
 Bethlem 'twas called, when it first was known  
 Bedlam, once its reputation had grown.

In time of Henry Third the place was raised  
 A dark and dreadful labyrinth of stone.  
 Five centuries, it held the mad and mazed  
 In darkness prisoned, afraid, alone.  
 Until for age and ill-use, Bedlam was razed  
 And built anew, all her sins lost and gone  
 Or so 'twas believ'd, but they little knew  
 The evil that Maeve's curse of love might do.

*Bethlem – while the Bethlem Royal Hospital exists to this day, still treating mental illness, it's early centuries are bound inextricably with tales of ignorance, brutality, cruelty and neglect. By the Regency period, Bethlem was well known under its ill-starred sobriquet, a word which entered the general language as a term for madness and chaos.*

*The writer of this poem uses the two names in an intriguing fashion – not precisely interchangeably, but rather more to suggest a certain point of view.*

*Mania and Melancholy – these two famous statues can still be seen on the site of the modern hospital.*

In time of Henry Third the place was raised  
 A dark and dreadful labyrinth of stone.  
 Five centuries, it held the mad and mazed  
 In darkness prisoned, afraid, alone.  
 Until for age and ill-use, Bedlam was razed  
 And built anew, all her sins lost and gone  
 Or so 'twas believ'd, but they little knew  
 The evil that Maeve's curse of love might do

For aye, the years of man are brief and few  
 But the Fay reck no count upon their lives  
 Maeve thought to outlast what Monro might do  
 As stone does face the tide, and yet survives.  
 She little thought his curse might live on too  
 In his children; why else do men take wives?  
 Maeve lay hidden 'til Monro's time was run  
 And found herself still blood-bound – to his son!

Not idly did she spend those dreary years.  
 Twice-prisoned, by magic as well as stone  
 She sought by her art to learn of her peers,  
 In vain. Of true Fay, she was the last one.  
 Alone, abandoned, yet she shed no tears  
 But set to making Bethlem all her own.  
 'Neath Monro's gaze, Maeve conjur'd unseen sport  
 A Queen invisible, Bedlam her court.

Still bound by the magus' long-hidden charm  
 She cloak'd her cunning works 'neath Fay glamour  
 Powerless to wreak Monro any harm  
 Maeve wrought instead ethereal clamour  
 So all in Bedlam felt subtle alarm  
 As if the spirits of the damned, or  
 Some unseely thing, some dire creeping pall  
 Made its brooding lair within Bedlam's wall.

*Unseely – another Scots or Northern term, meaning something like evil, wicked, or uncanny. The fairy folk of the Unseely Court were a kind of dark counterpart to the legendary glamour of the true kings and queens of the fairy.*

She whisper'd secrets in the reeking dark  
 She sang her wordless dirge upon the wind  
 On all who entered, etch'd her subtle mark  
 Murmured nightmares to each sleeping mind  
 Sent her word as Queen to all who might hark  
 And their path to Bedlam's court swiftly wend.  
 Monro might think he physicked Bethlem  
 But 'twas Maeve who ruled in darkest Bedlam.

Friends she found, aye, and allies of a kind  
 For often have the elf-struck been call'd mad  
 And those of Fay blood thought of wand'ring mind.  
 Whene'er such to Bedlam came, Maeve was glad  
 To welcome them, yet James Monro was blind  
 To the truth. Is it not both dark and sad?  
 The man knew not love, nor kindly magic  
 But lunatick horror and madness tragic.

So unto Bedlam came the forgotten  
 The damned, the doom'd, the unwanted spawn  
 The broken, the heartsick misbegotten,  
 And secretly Maeve led them, ev'ry one.  
 Of those without Fay blood, 'twas their lot in  
 Maeve's realm to deceive, to lead Monro on.  
 Her court amidst the ranks of madness hid  
 No mortal man might know what there Maeve did.

To further hide her new, unseely court  
 A skein of Time itself the queen did spin  
 As oft the Fay-folk did for simple sport  
 When seeking to deceive such as Tam Lin.  
 Twined cunningly 'round her half-blood cohort  
 The spell mazed all who dared to come within.  
 The very clocks went mad where Maeve held sway  
 Bedlam's dark heart recked neither night nor day.

*Elf-struck: or elf-shot – this is an old term for persons suffering a wasting madness. From the descriptions available, it seems likely in modern times we would call it 'depression'. Nevertheless, the writer is correct about the long standing connection in folklore between madness and the fairy folk.*

*A skein of Time – there are countless stories of encounters with the fairy folk leading to distortions in time. People report visiting the Fairy courts for a single night, only to return and discover that years have passed for their kin and loved ones.*



And still, for all her puissance and power  
 Maeve lay prisoner to James Monro's spell.  
 A caged beast, she must in darkness cower  
 And there amongst the bad and broken dwell.  
 Bound to the mage and Bedlam's black tower  
 No Virgil born might lead her forth from Hell.  
 For though the Fay queen hated James Monro  
 Spell-bound, entrapp'd, she could not work him woe.

Betwixt this James Monro, the self-same mage  
 Who wooed Maeve, and later feared her malice  
 Played well the role of doctor and of sage  
 Forswore magic, like a poison'd chalice  
 And midst the miasma of fairy rage  
 Strove to make Bethlem a healing palace  
 For all that he was something of a cad  
 By intent he was not – entirely – bad.

Rejecting demons, and the madness stone  
 Monro embraced the new Psychology  
 As if by Science he might yet atone  
 For the rake's life he once led so freely.  
 Perhaps he felt God might forgive someone  
 Who gave of himself to good works wholly.  
 If that was his hope, 'twas utterly vain  
 For he recked not of Maeve's unending pain.

Still, he put aside both grimoire and spell,  
 Let Gematria and Alchemy fall  
 Away, with Doctor John Dee and Flamel.  
 Gathering his magic books, one and all  
 Monro sealed them, and hid them well  
 In his home, within a hollow brick wall  
 Had they been destroyed, 'twould better be  
 But hindsight sees farther than prophecy.

*The Madness Stone – one early theory of mental illness held that a stone inside the brain could cause such maladies. A famous painting by Hieronymous Bosch depicts the surgical removal of such a stone.*

*Grimoire – from the same root as 'gramarye' earlier, a grimoire is a book of arcane or occult knowledge.*

*Gematria – a system of numerology based on the Hebrew alphabet.*

*Flamel – Nicholas Flamel was reputed to be an alchemist and sorcerer of the fourteenth century.*



Long, weary years against madness he fought  
 Seeking light amidst the dark and horror  
 The physician's way to his son he taught  
 The path of the healer, and evermore  
 The difficult but honest road he sought  
 Though it wearied him, left him sick and sore.  
 Yet 'twas all futile, for he could not know  
 Maeve's vengeance worked in Bedlam 'gainst Monro.

Long, weary years in darkness James Monro  
 Struggled against ignorance and despair  
 His mind, his soul, both slowly steep'd in woe  
 Until his body fail'd, and he gave care  
 Of Bethlem to his son John. Even so,  
 His suffering did not culminate there.  
 Seventeen fifty-one: his load was shed.  
 A scant year later, James Monro was dead.

In Bedlam's court, great was the rejoicing  
 At Monro's ending. Maeve thought herself free  
 And declar'd a revel, pleasure voicing  
 In merry song, and in sweet poetry.  
 The cloud of her rage lifting, her joy seem'd  
 Boundless, as her cage she prepared to flee.  
 But as I wrote, Queen Maeve did not yet know  
 That she was blood-bound still – to John Monro.

To Bedlam's court Maeve bid a swift farewell.  
 In Fay glamour wrapp'd she escaped the guards  
 Put off the iron chains of her small cell  
 Ventured outside, into the sunlit yards  
 She thought at long last to leave Bethlem's hell  
 Twenty years she'd languish'd behind its wards.  
 But as she thought the statue'd gates to pass  
 Dead Monro's geas caught and held her fast.

*Geas – a term from Irish  
 folklore describing a  
 magical prohibition or  
 obligation placed on a  
 person.*

Struggle as she might, poor Maeve could not break  
 The power vested in the bloodied hair  
 So near to freedom, yet she could not take  
 A single step beyond James Monroe's snare.  
 No hope her thirst for liberty to slake  
 She bowed her head, and foul revenge did swear.  
 Think you upon long-suffering Job's curse,  
 And know this: 'pon Monroe, Maeve call'd down worse!

'Twas in vain. Dead James Monroe's sorcery  
 Bound Maeve to his line. Protected them too  
 From her wrath, her wish for vengeance gory.  
 Her fell Fay temper kindled all anew,  
 Maeve vowed she would end this tragic story  
 But how? She had not e'en the smallest clew.  
 Some oracle she needed as a guide  
 With second sight her dark path to decide.

To raise an oracle is no small task;  
 One needs a person of a special kind.  
 For most, the future wears an occult mask  
 Only rarest talent may look behind  
 And even then, much sacrifice is asked  
 Of those gifted such an uncanny mind  
 Cassandra's ending, so dire and tragic  
 Is common 'mongst those who touch this magic.

Yet 'tis said: needs must when the devil drives  
 And Bedlam's queen was driven by far worse  
 Than devils. At madness' edge, she must strive  
 To escape the clutches of Monroe's curse  
 And from Bedlam hope to emerge alive.  
 Thus she an oracle's power must nurse  
 For what matters the reveal'd future's cost  
 If in staying hidden, all hope be lost?

Thus Maeve return'd unto her hidden court  
 And spoke she to her noble mooncalfs there  
 Trying each for the dire talent she sought  
 Sounding her elf-struck guard with subtle care  
 She feared all her searching must come to naught  
 Felt the bitter touch of darkest despair;  
 And then rose a cry: "Great Queen, now rejoice!  
 Though humble, I do hear the future's voice."

*Mooncalfs – yet another  
 archaic term for someone  
 suffering a mental illness.  
 Originally a word for a cow  
 foetus aborted by the evil  
 influence of the moon, it  
 came to mean a fool,  
 dullard, or idiot.*

Through Bedlam's serried ranks one forth did come  
 A wight of some little reknown was he.  
 Billy Blossom he was yclept by some  
 Approach'd Queen Maeve, and spoke on bended knee:  
 "My Queen, 'tis a tale oft told in Bedlam  
 That 'pon my birthing, I was one of three.  
 From the womb, 'twas only I came alive  
 My brothers both did not their birth survive."

*Yclept – old English word  
 meaning 'named', or 'known  
 as'*

"Maugre their deaths, my Queen, I tell thee true  
 My brothers at my side have ever been  
 And oft in times of need have spake unto  
 Me, with warning of trials unforeseen  
 And in this manner, have carried me through  
 All my few years, numbered but nineteen.  
 Though they come not upon my mere demand  
 If we may serve, we are yours to command."

Spake Maeve: "We greet thee, faithful subject and  
 Honoured prince of this, great Bedlam's Court.  
 Look you: we stretch forth a supplicant hand  
 To thee, who finds us now so much distraught.  
 Long we have wish'd to leave this irksome land  
 Of mortal men for good. Yet we are caught.  
 To be free once more, it seems we must know  
 A means to break this curse of James Monro."

“To this end, we would have thy brothers’ word,  
 Good Billy Blossom. And wilt thou beg their  
 Indulgence this day? Fain we would be heard.  
 For too long have we languished, and ere  
 Another spring hath brought her meed of birds  
 To Bedlam, and these bleak stone walls we share  
 We would be free. This we ask, and no more:  
 What cunning may ope this long-shutter’d door?”

Billy Blossom closed his eyes, to better  
 Hear the eldritch voices that spoke within  
 “O Queen,” said he, “Thy sorcerous fetters  
 Confound my dead brother and his dark twin,  
 It would seem, for so they both have said. Hear;  
 Much must be lost, this truth for thee to win.  
 Some answer my brothers can find for thee  
 If one of the two comes no more to me.”

*Eldritch – strange, weird,  
 eerie. Possibly from Middle  
 English 'elriche', an  
 adjective often used to  
 describe the fairy realms.*

Queen Maeve look'd down. A heavy, doleful sigh  
 'Scaped her lips, and perhaps she shed a tear.  
 Long minutes passed ere she gave her reply:  
 “We would not have it so, and yet we fear  
 If we do not leave, many more must die;  
 Dark, these centuries we have linger'd here.  
 So many we have slain, and all unplann'd  
 For we are Faery; ye be mortal man.

“In times past, Prince Blossom, we might command  
 Of thee this bitter service as our due  
 Recking naught of the blood spilt at our hand  
 Weighing only what we most wish'd to do.  
 Our will, the law uttermost of this land  
 Our whims at once fulfilled without ado.  
 Yet we have learn'd. And thus, we meekly ask  
 That thou may'st accept this dolorous task.”

Billy Blossom smiled. Said he, "My Queen,  
 Thou hast been mother to me and much more  
 In this dark place, so wicked and unclean  
 Unlike my true mother, in times of yore  
 Who left me when I spoke to those unseen.  
 A child, I was brought to this place of horror  
 And here, amidst the vile filth and fearful dread  
 You made a kindly place to rest my head"

"All I have is thine to command at whim  
 Even now, my brother calls from beyond  
 One is gone. I will hear no more from him  
 The other speaks softly. Let me respond."  
 Silent, he stood. The smoky lights grew dim  
 "Alas," he said. "Broken now is the bond.  
 One dead brother nevermore shall I see  
 But with his parting came these words for thee."

"By blood thou art bound. Blood alone can make  
 Thee free. Seek another of thy true blood.  
 Just such a one thy prison'd place may take  
 And, standing in the chains where thou hast stood  
 Endure Monro's curse for thy own fair sake  
 Only thus canst thou ever hope to make good  
 Upon thy dreams. If Bedlam thou wouldst flee  
 One of thy kin must a prisoner be."

"Alas," quoth Maeve, "This news is passing dire.  
 No kin have we left upon this cold earth.  
 Save such as thee. Alone we are, entire.  
 Of true Fay-folk, there is a mighty dearth  
 Most have left. Some few passed into the fire  
 So long gone, no ashes lie in the hearth.  
 What hope for freedom if no one remains  
 Who might stand for us, and bear up our chains?"

“A new question,” Blossom said, “And anew  
 My brother flies. What answer he may find  
 We shall straitly know. Perhaps yet some clue  
 To a long hidden man of Faery kind?  
 Hark! He fades! O alas, I fear ‘tis true  
 I am alone. His final message mind:  
 Enough of Faery blood and kin remain  
 That with much care, might yet breed true again.”

“How can this be?” Queen Maeve cried. “We ken not  
 The path thy brothers’ sacrifice hath lit.  
 Breed true once more? Might such a one be got  
 Of mortal stock as in our place might sit?  
 Oh Blossom; we fear it must be our lot  
 In chains and darkness, long and long to wait.  
 Until the passing of the last Monro  
 From this cold, cruel world we may not go.

*Ken – archaic term  
 meaning to see, or perceive.  
 Kept in the Scots  
 vernacular to modern  
 times.*

“My Queen,” said Blossom, “Do thou not despair.  
 Recall there is one brother yet to speak.  
 Thou didst save mine life. ‘Tis no more than fair  
 That I give my life to find what thou seek’st.  
 Right gladly now my brothers’ fate I share  
 That thy future days be ne’ermore so bleak.”  
 Blossom shut his eyes, and called Maeve close by  
 Whisper’d a name, then two; lay down to die.

Maeve held him close, his head upon her breast  
 Gently, slowly his shuttered eyes she kiss’d  
 “Go thee now to thy final, well-earned rest.  
 Thy kindly wisdom shall be greatly miss’d  
 Dear Blossom. Thy final words we shall test  
 Spending our powers to do as thou wist.  
 If Faery blood may rise of mortal stock  
 We may yet win free of this dismal rock.”

She gave him to death's stillness, so like sleep.  
 And the Court of Bedlam did him honour  
 With bowed heads, Then did Bedlam vigil keep  
 O'er him. In calm and dignified manner  
 They watched him through the night, and some did weep  
 All agreed: of the Court, none were finer.  
 Maeve's breast was heavy, for she did much rue  
 The cost of making Blossom's last words true.

Yet what choice had she? In Bedlam to pine  
 A prisoner to a forgotten spell  
 Awaiting some far day when Monro's line  
 Might fail, and release her from that hell,  
 Those dark walls which her freedom did confine.  
 No! She must escape her pestilent cell  
 As swiftly as she might. Maeve would win free  
 And join her lost kin in distant Faerie.

Maeve bowed her head and drew a shudd'ring breath  
 Her golden hair in waves across her face  
 She sought after strength. Billy Blossom's death  
 Must not be in vain. To escape this place  
 Of horror would perhaps repay her debt  
 To Blossom, if not all the human race.  
 So, like a farmer who breeds better swine  
 Maeve must raise Faery blood from mortal kine.

*Kine – an archaic term for  
 cattle, found in the bible  
 among other sources. The  
 word completes the  
 farmyard metaphor here.*

### CANTO III

Now there follow'd a span of bitter years  
 While hidden Maeve work'd her stealthy wiles  
 From Bethlem, that haunt of dolorous fears,  
 Her subtle reach spanned hundreds of miles  
 Spun shadows; whispered secrets into ears  
 Sleeping, distant. As the serpent beguiles  
 Her prey, as the spider doth trap the fly  
 Thus did Queen Maeve, on those who drew her eye.



The birds of the air her commands obeyed  
 All manner of small creatures served as spy  
 Or sentry. Adders crept where'er she bade  
 Them go. Hares listened for her. Foxes, sly  
 Thieves, sneak'd and stole. Ferrets in masquerade  
 Lurked in wait, Queen Maeve's desires to escry.  
 Across the length and breadth of English land  
 No place but felt the soft touch of Maeve's hand.

*Masquerade – probably a reference to the bandit-mask markings on the face of the common ferret. It seems unlikely the writer intended to suggest that Maeve somehow disguised her ferrets.*

In seaside Whitby, a coach was delayed  
 By a swarm of bees in a roadside tree  
 And so a certain man met a fair maid  
 That in otherwise he never might see.  
 This man and maid by the salt seaside played  
 Never knowing how they helped Maeve be free.  
 And this intricate plot was merely one  
 Of scores alike, all over Albion.

In Yorkshire, foul winds blew throughout the spring  
 So the barley harvest was poor, and small  
 A farmer sold his land, took his ailing  
 Wife south to better weather. In the fall  
 She met another, felt Cupid's sweet sting.  
 And in secrecy answered she love's call.  
 Of her secret trysts a brave boy-child came  
 With the lover's face, but the farmer's name.

Thus in subtle, secret ways Maeve did sow  
 The seeds from which her freedom must arise  
 Decades, and still more they would need to grow.  
 Meanwhile, the Queen maintained her clever guise  
 As an inmate of Bethlem. James Monro  
 For all his learning ne'er saw through her lies.  
 Striving ever 'gainst the Bedlam madness  
 Poor James Monro led a life of sadness.



Yet there was another. Tom, his grandson  
Like his forefathers, to medicine raised.  
A brilliant youth who aimed to become one  
Of Albion's best, universally prais'd.  
He studied endlessly, eschewed all fun  
Drove himself on, until his mind grew crazed  
He was one who simply could never shirk  
The martinet cries of 'duty' and 'work'.

It happened one day he needed more space  
For his swift-growing collection of books  
Took it on himself to make a new place  
Amongst the Monro house's many nooks.  
He saw that one wall of brick at its base  
Differed a little, somehow, in its looks,  
And checking carefully of the mortar  
Found the bricks did not fit as they ought to.

Curious, young Tom took up a pry-bar  
And swiftly opened up the suspect wall  
Found he there his grandfather's reservoir  
Of dark tomes and grimoires, forbidden all.  
He moved a wardrobe to hide the wall's scar  
And set to studying James Monro's fall.  
But barbarous magic young Tom did scorn  
Twas the new *science* to which he was sworn!

Indeed, why not so? Had not these learnings  
Already stolen miracles from God?  
Think but of Benjamin Franklin's earnings  
From his invention of the lightning rod.  
And what then of the steam engine's turnings?  
Commonplace now, and yet once such things awed  
All who witness'd. This Tom Monro knew well:  
The call of Science was magic's death-knell.

Long did Thomas study his grandsire's work  
 Sieving the foolish dross for gems of truth  
 Driving himself to learn. He did not shirk  
 Nor seek out the idle pleasures of youth  
 Neglecting even sessions at the kirk  
 Which folly brought him much of strife, in sooth!  
 (For if you would your own good name besmirch  
 Why, you must merely abandon the Church!)

*Kirk – an old Scots term,  
 still in use today, for a  
 church.*

Thus the twain: deep in Bedlam, magic's Queen  
 Her arts directed a champion to raise  
 Her cunning works concealed and unseen  
 By her magics, hidden from all men's gaze.  
 While without, young Tom Monro wove a skein  
 Of knowledge which might set the world ablaze.  
 Each one paying a fearful, bitter cost  
 And each, the other's purpose wholly cross'd.

So matters remained. For decades, silent  
 Battle raged. Ever John Monro sought to  
 Repair the minds that were to Bethlem sent  
 While Maeve kept secret court in Bedlam true,  
 And without, her myriad agents went  
 To Earth's ends, their Queen's orders to pursue:  
 A thousand lives touched in minuscule ways  
 A new child of fairy blood to upraise.

John Monro's work in Bethlem is well known  
 If much less loved. All manner of treatment  
 He tried. From chaining patients all alone  
 Through leeching, cold baths, and wicked torment  
 Of the senses. He made the inmates groan  
 For their suffering. He did not repent  
 Of any cruelty, but held it just and meet  
 If such might return madmen to the street.

Of purgatives and emetics Monro  
Made great use, and blistering practis'd well.  
 His treatments alone laid so many low  
 That some succumbed outright, and the death knell  
 Rang out among the many kirks below  
 Bethlem. Not a hospice, but a true Hell;  
 For all of Monro's laudable intent  
 By Maeve's magic his will was cruelly bent.

No harm could she do, restrain'd by the curse  
 Of James Monro, but with dark fairy guile  
 She led John to see good in what was worse.  
 Mazed his mind and turned his hands, all the while  
 Concealing Bedlam Court behind diverse  
 Glamours. Still, Bedlam life was a trial.  
 Denied the air, the sun, the waters pure  
 Slowly, surely, Maeve's own mind did unmoor.

Across seasons and years the Court grew dark  
 As Maeve forgot her gentle fairy ways  
 And the Bedlam nobles began to hark  
 Back unto times long gone, and wilder days.  
 Even to the bricks, madness left its mark  
 Filling all Bethlem with a dread malaise.  
 While all within were to madness turning  
 Thomas Monro watched, and waited, learning.

He read from Priestley, studying the air  
 And all the gasses essential to life  
 Wrote to Lavoisier in Paris, ere  
 The guillotine abolished all his strife.  
 Took anatomy from the great Hunter  
 And from Pott, the art of the surgeon's knife.  
 Yet the smallest or least he did not spurn  
 If a teacher knew aught -- Monro would learn.

*Purgatives, emetics, and blistering – Another early belief on the source of insanity held that 'foul humours' or 'vile spirits' entered the victims body. Such things, it was believed, could be drained off or driven out by forcing various fluids out of the body.*

*Priestley, Lavoisier, Hunter and Pott are all well known figures from the scientific blossoming which followed The Enlightenment.*

The work of Mesmer he read with delight,  
 And he studied magnetism after that.  
 Galvani and Volta he'd freely cite  
 In conjunction with Ben Franklin, whereat  
 He studied much of lightnings with a kite.  
 In correspondence with Jean-Paul Marat  
 He learned about the uses medical  
 For apparatuses electrical.

With new learning, Tom Monro mixed the old  
 Such as he had of his grandsire's papers  
 On transmutation of lead into gold  
 And alchemic use of nitric vapours.  
 He searched for spirits that Agrippa told  
 Of, and examined St-Germaine's capers.  
 The Rosy Cross from Newton he read and  
 Turned even to the path of the Left Hand.

Throughout, he worked at Bethlem as did his  
 Father, and his grandfather before him.  
 But Thomas suspected something amiss:  
 Within Bethlem's walls, tenebrous and grim  
 So many died; yet some few did persist  
 From year to year still sound of wind and limb  
 That these few were strange was his inference  
 But his riddle: what was their difference?

Monro's occult studies made him wary  
 Of matters he did not yet understand.  
 Of new phenomena he was chary  
 Thus he observed, and with much care he planned.  
 The time would come, and he would be where he  
 Must be. Till then, best not to tip his hand.  
 When he was Bethlem's master he might act  
 As he would; an indisputable fact.

*Mesmer – Franz Anton  
 Mesmer is known as the  
 father of modern  
 hypnotism, though he did  
 not himself seem to  
 understand what he had  
 discovered. Mesmer  
 believed his discovery was  
 related to magnetism, and  
 his reputation eventually  
 collapsed, leaving him to  
 die as a charlatan.*

*Magical and occult  
 references abound here.  
 The Comte de St-Germaine  
 was a well-known  
 character in the 18<sup>th</sup>  
 century, purporting to be an  
 immortal some five hundred  
 years old. Cornelius  
 Agrippa was a well-known  
 alchemist, while Isaac  
 Newton also studied  
 alchemy in secret. The Rosy  
 Cross is a symbol of secret  
 magical knowledge,  
 adopted by a number of  
 societies of the sixteenth  
 century and onwards.*

Until such time, he would move with great care  
 Seeing all and saying naught in that place.  
 Learning all he might, until at last there  
 Came the chance his dark suspicions to trace.  
 All would see then how a Monro might fare  
 And history his family would grace.  
 Such were his prideful plans, and even so  
 The awful ambitions of Tom Monro.

Three decades from the death of James Monro  
 A paralysis struck down his son John,  
 And from Bethlem's halls he at last did go  
 Yet still, twas not the time for Tom his son.  
 There was too much yet that he did not know.  
 His web of darkest learning not yet spun.  
 It suited Thomas yet to bide his time;  
 Awaiting a far more propitious clime.

Meanwhile, Queen Maeve's garden of schemes bore fruit.  
 O'er the decades the old blood rose once more  
 North in Scotland, most of all, it took root.  
 In an old house on the edge of a moor  
 A vine long forgot sent forth a new shoot  
 Hale and hearty, albeit somewhat poor.  
 A boy child, strong and mickle fair of face  
 Whose wry foot marked him of the fairy race.

The lad was born of old nobility  
 A family fallen out of favour  
 But proud, and noted for ability  
 In ancient battles, there were none braver  
 Yet owing to fortune's fragility  
 It would seem their salt had lost its savour  
 Unloved then of princes, queens and kings  
 They seemed destined for ever lesser things.

*Wry foot – common belief held that persons born with a deformity were 'touched with fairy blood', or even changelings (fairy children substituted for mortal babies). Byron, of course, is well-known to have suffered from talipes or "club foot".*

*Old nobility – Byron could claim royal connections going back many generations, but by his time the family had lost most of its fortune.*

*"...salt had lost it's savour"  
 – Biblical reference (Matthew 5:13) suggesting the family had become worthless or valueless to society.*

But for the machinations of Queen Maeve  
Which brought about this boy-child's timely birth  
'Tis likely as not that, however brave,  
These folk should have vanished from the earth.  
Lacking monies their house and name to save,  
Their debts exceeding far their fiscal worth.  
Yet Queen Maeve required a champion bold;  
She lifted the fortunes of young Harold.

A distant cousin's death, quite fortunate  
Brought in some small coin to help raise the lad.  
Quelled those creditors most importunate;  
Though little enough left over they had.  
Of the old house, there were but few rooms that  
Did not leak, and were rightwise warmly clad.  
Of food, and clothing, and other such stuff  
There was no surplus, but there was enough

Of servants, there were but a paltry few  
A maid, a cook, a nurse to raise the child.  
When young, Harold had no lessons to do  
And thus as any brave lad, he ran wild  
Through the moors and fields, and the deep woods too  
Where flowers bloomed bright, and the warm sun smiled.  
Learning from the wilderness creatures there  
The boy recked nothing of mere mortal care.

From the birds of the air, he learned the wind  
And weather, and much of music and song.  
From the forest beasts of every kind  
Harold grew woods-wise, and quick, and ere long  
Sharp and swift became his clever child's mind  
While his small frame grew vigorous and strong  
Harold's wild ways drove his nurse to despair  
Yet the finest days of his life were there.

*Harold – the poem which brought fame to Byron is 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'. It describes the journeys of a world-weary young man, and is thought to contain a great deal of autobiographical material.*



He was especially fond of water  
 Be it the sea, a still pond, or clear stream  
 He bathed and swam, lithe as any otter  
 His dark hair curling over skin like cream  
 In the sunlight. By all, he was thought fair  
 By most who knew him, held in good esteem.  
 A fine and cheerful child, though somewhat shy  
 And ashamed of his right foot, which was wry.

Though he knew it not, his twisted foot show'd  
 The fairy blood in him ran deep, and true.  
 'Tis a sign well known, a dark gift bestow'd  
 Willy-nilly, upon only those who  
 Partake of the highest, the most hallow'd  
 Blood lines of fairydom, and these are few.  
 For fairy grace of e'en the smallest share  
 Is too much for man's mortal frame to bear.

In his youth, Harold showed no outward sign  
 Of his import to the prison'd Queen's plan.  
 No miracles; no water into wine  
 He did not walk upon the North Sea's span,  
 And to prophecy, he did not incline.  
 He seemed destined to grow into – a man.  
 Which is no shame in the grand scheme of things,  
 But small boys dream they will be princes; kings.

Thus with Harold. Within his secret heart  
 There hid greatness, or he believ'd it so,  
 Though he could not say what set him apart  
 From his peers and kin, for he did not know.  
 And 'round him there were none who might impart  
 Such wisdom. Harold's confidence, I trow,  
 Was so great that some came to call him mad  
 While others frowned, and named him merely bad.

*Fond of water – Lord Byron was a famously strong swimmer, braving the legendary Hellespont crossing at least twice. He also professed a lifelong fondness for animals, keeping a menagerie of pets, and tolerating no cruelty towards the 'lesser creatures'.*

*Bad – it is hard to see the final lines of this stanza as anything other than the famous description of Byron coined by Lady Caroline Lamb: "mad, bad and dangerous to know."*

In fact, there was a truth he could not tell  
A secret, hidden thing that lay within  
Him, like a cunning serpent in a well.  
A voice, a face, a half-seen, darkling mien  
In dreams, a whisper like a magic spell.  
Elusive as some fabled Persian djinn,  
He felt this creature's invisible gaze  
A sensation haunting his nights and days.

As one may feel a hidden watcher's eyes  
Set the fine, soft hairs on one's nape a-creep  
Harold felt, even alone 'neath clear skies  
Or most often, on the dark edge of sleep.  
Betimes he would turn, in hopes to surprise  
This unseen lurker in its hidden keep.  
No matter how he turned and looked behind  
His cryptic watcher he could never find.

He knew her for a woman, though not why  
He was sure of this. In his dreams she came  
To him, he thought, to watch, oftentimes to sigh.  
She seldom spoke, never offered her name;  
Seemed deeply sorrowed, and he wondered why.  
Some loss, perhaps? Some secret, hidden shame?  
Her silent plight touched Harold's inmost heart  
He sought to shape his feelings into Art.

No painter was Harold. He had not the eye  
Nor patience for grinding pigments at need.  
His efforts at the spinet went awry  
When called upon to sing, he mutinied.  
But with words, his talent none could deny  
A rhymers then, his gift was rare indeed.  
Driven, unknowing, by Queen Maeve's dark curse  
Harold became a famed master of verse.



Now a young man, his fortunes soon climbed  
 Rising like the lark: melodious bird!  
 In journals, books and in pamphlets he rhymed;  
 Women swooning for beauty of his words.  
 His rise to fame was elegantly timed  
 Right swiftly England made of him a Lord.  
 Ah, but when a man is raised high, recall:  
 The greater the heights, the greater the fall.

#### CANTO IV

Now our tale is poised, hanging in balance  
 Between the three: Doctor Thomas Monro,  
 Queen Maeve of Bedlam, and Harold. What chance  
 Now for Maeve's freedom? Does the Doctor know  
 Yet of Bedlam's secret court? Or perchance  
 Will Harold shed his blood, and let Maeve go?  
 Events now move unto a crucial state  
 But there are matters first I must relate.

In the years that Harold grew to a man  
 Tom Monro was not idle. Having learn'd  
 A little of Bedlam, he laid a plan  
 To discover more. He was much concern'd  
 By those who lived beyond the normal span,  
 And so, to knowledge dark and old he turned.  
 Blood from the uncanny patients he drew  
 To discern the false madmen from the true.

What then he learned, or how, I cannot say  
 Except that it cost him several years  
 Of work. Eventually, in some dark way  
 The Doctor bore out Queen Maeve's secret fears  
 Discovering the Court, to her dismay  
 Though none of its deep secrets, nor its years.  
 He knew not their part-Fay blood, but could tell  
 The Bedlam Court from those merely unwell.

Of course, Monro did not announce his news  
 To the world, watching in secret instead.  
 Nor did Queen Maeve his beliefs disabuse  
 Pretending ignorance, though with much dread  
 Of the purpose to his covert reviews,  
 While swiftly she moved all her plans ahead.  
 She did not now how Monro found her Court;  
 She knew only that her time must be short.

For his part, Monro planned a master stroke  
 To unsettle the strange group he had found.  
 Bethlem's decrepit building was a joke;  
 A shattered wreck, a weeping, open wound.  
 A fine new building, designed and bespoke  
 Would all Bethlem's critics soon confound.  
 The Doctor spoke of clean water and air;  
 But he meant to destroy Maeve's Bedlam lair.

By now, Monro was Bethlem's doctor chief  
 Like his father and grandfather before  
 He spoke at length in public, and feigned grief  
 At Bethlem's status, which he did abhor.  
 A new building, much like a brand new leaf  
 Turned over, he claimed, would swiftly restore  
 Bethlem to her vaunted former glory  
 A happy end to madness' bitter story.

Monro spoke well. The monies soon were raised  
 Plans laid, and new grounds in Southwark obtained.  
 The swiftness of the new works much amazed  
 The public, while in secret, Maeve was pained  
 To see Bedlam so very promptly razed,  
 Her history abandoned and disdained.  
 Only the two statues were brought from there  
 Two statues – and John Monro's cursed hair!

*Southwark – by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state of the old Moorfields Bethlem hospital was legendary. No wall sat straight to any other, it was said. The new building in St Georges Field, Southwark was, designed by James Lewis from various entries to a competition created for the purpose. Neoclassical in style, it was much larger and better lit than the old building. First occupied in 1815, the place soon acquired a reputation every bit as sinister and vile as its predecessor.*

Anon, a new oracle joined the Court  
 A lass who had lost her eyes to small pox  
 Said she, "Monro's plans we must swiftly thwart,  
 Or he'll separate us with doors and locks  
 Of iron, and our schemes must come to naught."  
 Blind she was, but more cunning than the fox,  
 And her wry-sight gift made her more able  
 Than many folk the doctors deemed stable.

"I have watched this Thomas Monro," said she  
 "With eyes that see deeper than simple sight.  
 He knows of Bedlam, though not yet what we  
 Are in truth. He would drag us to the light  
 And dissect us as specimens, to see  
 The inner works of our bodies aright.  
 He lacks all trace of sweet human kindness;  
 Destroying those in whom he seeks madness."

Spake Maeve, Bedlam's Queen: "Rightwise hast thou seen,  
 Good milady White. Yet do not despair  
 For not idle, these long years have we been  
 Though prison'd here in madness' very lair.  
 A yeoman have we raised, with senses keen  
 And sinews brawny. Into this dark affair  
 Shall we draw him, and bring his blood to life  
 To this Gordian knot shall he be our knife."

"Oft hast thou spake of Harold," Lady White  
 Said in reply. "A Lord and Peer is he.  
 How shall he hither come to be thy knight?"  
 Quoth Queen Maeve, "King George himself, we tell thee,  
 Lies now elf-struck by our cunning and might.  
 His doctor, this Thomas Monro shall be.  
 'Tis certain the Lords soon shall seek to know  
 All they may of Doctor Thomas Monro"

*Iron – in folklore, the Fairy folk and their magic are notoriously vulnerable to iron; particularly cold-wrought or cold-forged iron. Presumably, iron doors and locks would present special difficulties to the inhabitants of Bedlam Court.*

*King George – the very name of The Regency refers to the period of time in which the Prince of Wales held the throne in proxy for his father King George III who was afflicted by a serious and recurrent mental illness. The king was, in fact, treated by none other than Doctor Thomas Monro, Chief Physician of Bedlam.*

The Lady White smiled, and clapped her soft hands  
 "A wise plan," said she. "They will send a Lord  
 To Bethlem, to discover how it stands  
 With those inside. It must be one whose word  
 Is much esteemed across the English lands.  
 Thus our Harold: his poetry is adored.  
 And he is gentle. He can reassure  
 The people that Thomas Monro is pure."

*Gentle – this is clearly a reference to Harold's noble (or 'gentle') birth.. As a natural ruler and leader and member of the aristocracy, presumably his opinions would carry considerable weight in public matters.*

"So the Lords will think," said Queen Maeve, "But  
 We shall show him truth, and he will thus know  
 That the smiling face this Monro doth strut  
 Conceals a pit of misery and woe.  
 Then Harold willingly his flesh will cut  
 And our blood mingle. At last, we may go  
 Forth from this accursed, benighted place  
 And seek our path to final fairy grace."

"But thou, our Seer Lady White," Queen Maeve said  
 "Must guardian and guide to Harold be  
 For the Bedlam road is beset with dread  
 For a gentleman poet, such as he.  
 And Thomas Monro would fain see him dead  
 Than become Champion, and set us free.  
 He must choose freely, for better or worse  
 To take up Bedlam's throne, and end this curse."

"It shall be so," the blind Seer said, and took  
 Up her stick of rowan wood. Down the hall  
 Of dark stone went she, drawing not a look  
 From wardsmen, nurses, watchers one and all.  
 To the kitchens, where she slipped past the cook  
 Into the gardens, and thence to the wall.  
 Then by way of a little postern gate  
 She joined with some visitors, leaving late.

*Rowan – the Rowan, or Mountain Ash is a tree native to the British isles which enjoys an ancient association with Fairy kind in particular, and magic in general.*

For who sees the blind, the sick, or the poor?  
 They pass us invisibly by each day.  
 Thus the Seer could slip out Bethlem's door  
 And back in as she wished. She made her way  
 Across the Thames as oft she had before  
 To London City, where Harold's house lay.  
 Over him, Lady White must watch and ward;  
 A mentor anon, but for now, a guard.

In this time, Thomas Monro had learned some  
 Secrets from all the stolen Bedlam blood;  
 Found how to make true fairy silver from  
 Mercury, silver, blood and rowan wood;  
 Made armour of it, a full suit custom  
 Built for his frame, much like the hand of Lludd.  
 Fairy silver is a marvel now lost  
 Never to be regained at any cost.

It moved upon him like a second skin  
 Silken, smooth and shining, yet strong as steel  
 Protecting perfectly the man within  
 Moving to his will, lithe as any eel.  
 'Twas a nonpareil, a device akin  
 To life itself, a perfect thing, ideal.  
 Thomas Monro kept it hidden away  
 But admired it lovingly each day.

Still more he sought, and towards such an end  
 Monro would take up members of the Court  
 Unto his private laboratories, then  
 From their struggling bodies he would extort,  
 With experiments that I dare not pen,  
 Such crumbs of new learning as could be caught.  
 No heed he paid to his patients keen pain  
 If he believed there was knowledge to gain.

*London City – by 1815,  
 Byron was married and  
 living in a residence near  
 Pall Mall, in St James St  
 within the ancient City of  
 London itself. The usage of  
 the term 'the city' to  
 describe the central region  
 of London once  
 circumscribed by a  
 medieval protective wall  
 persists to this day.*

*Lludd – Lludd Llaw Eirant  
 is a legendary Welsh hero  
 with a hand of living silver.  
 He is equivalent to the Irish  
 Nuada.*

Yet despite Monro's persuasions vile  
The Court of Bedlam held their secrets close  
Suffering all in silence, and meanwhile  
Concealing Queen Maeve from her vicious foe's  
Awareness; this last fairy, this exile  
In a world grown ugly and bellicose.  
For love of their fairy queen did the Court  
Deny with their lives all that Monro sought.

Enraged, frustrated, Monro besought aid,  
Sending for Mesmer from the Continent.  
Asked the venerable wizard to trade  
His skills, and eagerly received consent;  
Brought him secretly across the blockade  
Of shipping, to devise a new torment  
With which from Bedlam's Court to straitwise wrest  
Knowledge of Queen Maeve and her hidden nest.

The wizard Mesmer spoke to Monro thus:  
"I likewise found some patients strange indeed  
When I practised. There is much to discuss.  
In Paris, there were some who could, at need  
Resist all my art. Such are dangerous  
Folk, I deem. If we two are to succeed  
We must combine my skills with your lightning;  
As one, they will be truly frightening."

Said Monro, "Romagnosi of Trento  
Has moved a magnet with a Voltaic pile.  
You worked with magnets, sir. This much I know.  
Refine your practice here and now, the while  
I build a new device. Lightning shall go  
At your right hand, whene'er you work your wiles."  
So saying, he began work then and there  
On a new machine; a thing of nightmare.

*Mesmer – there may be some confusion as to the time frame here. Franz Anton Mesmer's biography has him dying in March 1815, months before the new Bethlem hospital was occupied.*

*Blockade – 1815 marked the return of the Napoleonic wars, and the English navy had blockaded most of the major continental ports to hamper the Emperor's movements and prevent a seaborne invasion of England.*

*Romagnosi of Trento – This is a reference to Gian Domenico Romagnosi of Trento, who in 1802 showed that the charge generated by a Voltaic pile (an early electrical cell, named for the famed experimenter Alessandro Volta) could affect a compass needle. This is one of the earliest known experiments linking electricity with magnetism.*



Now Maeve her power conserved with great care  
 Winding deep glamour all new Bedlam through  
 Bewildering all who would venture there  
 Deceiving the eyes of all those whose view  
 Of Bedlam Court might aid Monro's terror  
 Or provide him with some important clew.  
 Constrained by the curse, she could work no harm

But must wait on Harold to break the charm.  
 Young Harold betimes had his troubles enow  
 For London life found him somewhat wanting  
 Of money, 'twould seem. He could not see how  
 He might pursue gambling, drink and hunting  
 As did his friends. There were none to endow  
 Him with the wealth that others were flaunting.  
 Though he was the heart of Maeve's daring plan  
 He was yet a proud, vain, foolish young man.

He borrowed, for he had friends a-plenty  
 And others, eager to trade on his fame  
 As a poet and a lord, which meant he  
 Fell deep in debt. With naught of worth save name,  
 Why, off to find a wife of wealth went he!  
 Yet matrimony seemed a foolish game,  
 For what mortal maid could hope to compare  
 To she of his dreams: Maeve of golden hair?

Abject, he sought his ancient home to sell  
 But he found none who were willing to buy  
 For the sum needed. An old house, but well  
 Founded with lands and game in good supply  
 Yet too far from London. A debtor's hell  
 Threatened Harold. He thought perhaps to fly.  
 Then came a call: a man who did propose  
 A means to resolve Harold's fiscal woes.

*Ancient home to sell –  
 Byron's problems with debt  
 are well documented, and  
 by 1815 he was attempting  
 to sell off the ancestral  
 home: Newstead Abbey in  
 Nottinghamshire. It is also  
 around this time that Byron  
 married Annabella, the  
 daughter of the wealthy  
 baronet Sir Ralph  
 Milbanke.*

This man's identity I'll not reveal  
 Lest old wounds be reopened. His good name  
 Is imperiled enow. Let time now heal  
 What it may. Say only this: in the game  
 Of ruling, he was a master. I feel  
 This clew sufficient. I need not defame  
 A man whose well-known gift for treachery  
 Was matched only by his vile lechery.

This paragon took young Harold aside  
 Saying: "'Tis well known that George, our good King  
 Is ill. Of his doctor, we must decide  
 Who, among many, is most promising.  
 I trust in Monro, but some have belied  
 His art. I must send some one enquiring.  
 To Bethlem a trusted agent must go  
 And show the merit of Thomas Monro."

Then Harold said: "Of Bethlem are rumours  
 Spread, which have it as no healing place  
 But a nightmare, rife with evil humours.  
 I'll have no part of this, by God's good grace."  
 "A shame," said the other. "You could do more  
 Of good, were you these rumours to erase.  
 You are young and bold. Your name is trusted.  
 By debtor's gaol you'd be disgusted."

"You threaten me?" cried Harold. "Fie! For shame!  
 Of such foul stuff is this government made!"  
 "No threat," came the reply. "But just the same  
 Your fate is likely to be as I said  
 When the stigma of debt darkens your name.  
 Such things your fame cannot help you evade.  
 But if you speak well of Thomas Monro  
 I'll wager there's an end upon your woe."

*Identity – guessing the name of this character is an intriguing game. He must be a person of sufficient political power to shape an official inquiry at the highest levels, such as the real-world Parliamentary Inquiry into Bethlem which would appear to be referenced here. Clearly, the writer dislikes the man, and places him opposite to Harold/Byron in political terms. Robert Jenkinson, the Lord Liverpool was a staunch Tory, and held the office of Prime Minister from 1812 through to 1827. A candidate? Surely.*



So saying, the gentleman took his leave  
 With Harold, deeply troubled in his wake.  
 He was not a man who liked to deceive  
 Holding to truth for his own good name's sake.  
 This trickery he scarcely could conceive;  
 Perhaps his caller had made some mistake?  
 Never could Harold wager the King's health  
 Against the promise of clandestine pelf.

*Pelf— an archaic term for  
 ill-gotten monies.*

The proper course, it seemed to Harold's mind  
 Must be a secret visit to Bethlem  
 And there incognito, the truth to find  
 Regarding this Monro, to praise or condemn  
 Aright. If the doctor proved good and kind  
 Harold might without shame speak well of him  
 And thereby with proper justice obtain  
 The monies needed to clean his debt's stain.

And if this Doctor Monro should prove vile?  
 Why then, Harold must hold fast to the truth  
 Speak plainly, and eschew all forms of guile.  
 Far better a debtor than false, in sooth.  
 Thomas Monro must stand up to trial  
 And be denounced if found wanting of ruth.  
 Thus Harold took up his coat, stick and gun  
 And sallied forth into the setting sun.

*Gun – The first  
 metropolitan police force  
 was established by law  
 under Sir Robert Peel, in  
 1829. During the Regency  
 period, large areas of  
 London were notoriously  
 rough and lawless. It was  
 perfectly normal for a  
 gentleman to travel with a  
 loaded pistol or two, and  
 Lord Byron was famous for  
 his marksmanship.*

And close behind, but ever out of sight  
 Came the Seer of Bedlam, watching over  
 Harold, as she had promised Maeve. In spite  
 Of his caution, Harold knew naught of her.  
 He hurried on, travelling with the light  
 As it faded, crossing the Thames over.  
 Thus to Southwark, and to Bethlem at last  
 Came the Champion, Seer following fast.

To the eyes of most, Harold seemed no more  
 Than a man. Comely, yes, but no Adonis,  
 No mighty warrior of days of yore.  
 A strong frame, dark curling hair atop a  
 Well-shaped head. Yet the Seer's heart in uproar  
 Beat, for her wry-sight showed his true promise:  
 To her, it seemed he walked in golden light  
 That shimmered like silk, and drove away the night.

The beauty of him snatched her breath away  
 Left her a-tremble, a leaf on the storm.  
 Framed where he stood, in Bethlem's main doorway  
 The last daylight limning his graceful form,  
 Lithe and strong, like the mighty stag at bay.  
 She swore then she would keep him from all harm.  
 Ah, Love: the chink within the strongest wall.  
 How oft has Romance ended with a fall?

On the lintel Harold stood, ill at ease.  
 The hairs upon his neck rose, like a hound  
 That some phantasm invisible yet sees  
 And trembles as if struck with a heart wound,  
 Or the mouse, that before the cat doth freeze  
 Even in death to make no slightest sound.  
 By the eldritch prickling of his fair skin  
 He knew magic and peril lay within.

His courage failed. Harold turned, and then  
 There came a gentle touch upon his wrist.  
 "I pray thee, sir, take up my hand, and when  
 I falter, guide me," she said, and he wist  
 At last the Seer stood by. True gentlemen  
 Stand ever ready a lass to assist.  
 Taking Lady White the Seer by the hand  
 Thus came Harold at last, into Bethlem.

*Wist – an archaic term for  
 'knew', or 'was aware of'*

## CANTO V

Into the high, wide entry hall they went  
 Hand in hand, as young, breathless lovers might,  
 Until Harold spoke: "What is the portent  
 Of these statues twain? Such an awful sight.  
 Scarce have mine eyes beheld such dire torment  
 As here. See! What can ail this wretched wight?"  
 The statue 'neath his touch did burn, for there  
 In its hand it held Maeve's accursed hair.

Unknowing, the Seer drew Harold away.  
 "They are but stone, and dumb as any brute  
 That dwells beyond the kindly reach of day.  
 Come! Others await us who are less mute.  
 Stay by my side, Champion; do not stray.  
 I will show you those Monro names 'acute'.  
 And you shall quickly see for your own self  
 What import Monro gives his patients' health."

*Acute – cases of mental disorder in Bedlam were classified by various means, but those determined to be 'acute' were given the most aggressive treatment.*

"Stay!" cried Harold. "Too much there is I do  
 Not understand. Your eyes! Are you not blind?  
 Yet you have no stick, and your gait is true  
 As a man of sight. How is it you can find  
 Your path these narrow, mazy hallways through?  
 Are you human, or are you demonkind?"  
 The Seer paused then, and she merely smiled,  
 At him as though she comforted a child.

"There is yet much," she said, "Beyond your ken  
 I fear. Take heart, Harold, and follow me,  
 For I have come to make you Champion  
 Of the Bedlam Court, and you shall free  
 Our Queen. 'Tis but you, alone of all men  
 Can do this, I tell you. Will you trust me?"  
 Lady White stretched forth her pale hand once more  
 And drew young Harold through the inner door.

Cried Harold then, "These things convey no sense.  
 Eyeless, you see. You speak of Bedlam Court;  
 A Queen entrapp'd, as if to take me thence,  
 Yet we stand in a madhouse. There is naught  
 Of royalty herein. Tell me, please: whence  
 Come these strange phantasms? I had merely thought  
 To visit Bethlem for myself, to know  
 The character of this Thomas Monro."

The Lady Seer smiled, and touched his dark eyes.  
 "See then," she said, "And you shall know for fact  
 That Monro's good works are a web of lies,  
 A cunning dissemblance, a clever act."  
 She led him deeper. To his great surprise,  
 No guards mov'd, as if they, not she, eyes lacked.  
 Far into Bethlem's heart the twain did go  
 Silent and unmarked as any shadow.

Spake Harold, "Why is there no hue and cry?  
 The wardsmen pay us not the slightest glance  
 As we pass. Are they blind? O, tell me why  
 We invade Bethlem, and none look askance."  
 "By will of Bedlam's Queen," came the reply,  
 "None within these walls shall stay our advance.  
 There are none to defy her, save Monro.  
 Upon him alone our Queen may work no woe."

"But look," said the Seer, "In this wretched cell  
 Amongst the rats and rotten straw, and see  
 The hopeless creature who therein doth dwell.  
 By name of Lucy, a milkmaid was she  
 Before Monro began to make her well,  
 With baths, and bleeding, and chains. I pray thee,  
 Observe the sores that swarm upon her skin.  
 Judge how tender Monro's treatments have been."

*Baths – icewater baths  
 were a favoured treatment  
 under Doctor Thomas  
 Monro.*

“And here,” she went on, “This rag of a man  
Was once a boxer of reknown, To drink  
He fell victim, and thence to Monro’s plan  
Of leeching, and binding. He can not think  
Nor speak, nor even walk a steady span.  
He fouls himself, and sits amidst the stink.  
Yet for all that his mind is plainly ripp’d  
Monro routinely orders he be whipp’d

*Binding – a practice  
whereby the patient was  
rendered immobile with wet  
sheets wrapped tightly  
around him so he could not  
move.*

In this fashion, the Seer led Harold on  
Past the wounded, the halt, the lame and mad  
Unto the heart of Bethlem, – and beyond!  
She pulled him close, and kissed his eyes. He had  
A giddy turn, and blinked. Bethlem was gone!  
Instead, a palace, light and gay and glad.  
Said the Seer “And thus do I now unbind  
Thy sight. Look not with eyes, but with the mind!”

*Whipping – patients  
perceived as obstinate or  
aggressive were often  
whipped by the wardsmen.*

Harold gazed about, and spoke not a word  
As sheer surprise and delight struck him dumb,  
To find himself so wondrously immured,  
For at last, Harold had to Bedlam come.  
“If madness this be, let me not be cured,”  
Quoth he in awe. “Not madness, but Bedlam,”  
Said Lady White the Seer, “And here our Queen  
Rules wisely over all, keeps all serene.”

“What Queen is this?” Harold asked. “I know not  
Of whom you speak. Bedlam is but Bethlem;  
A vulgar name. If perchance you know aught  
Of these marvels I see, do not condemn  
Me to ignorance. Fain would I be taught  
Of these wonders, the secrets behind them.  
For ’tis sure no ugly madhouse is this  
But some paradise of joy and calm bliss.”

About him, he saw walls of chalcedony,  
White as snow. Music of harps fill'd the air  
With sweet melody. Soon Harold found he  
Could smell honeysuckle, and roses fair  
As if in a garden stood he. When he  
Turned, he knelt, awed by who he saw there.  
She stood in splendour; her radiant mien  
Declaring her the fairest: Bedlam's Queen.

"What riddle is this?" Harold cried aloud,  
Shielding his eyes with a long-fingered hand  
"I know thy face, O maid, I am avow'd,  
Save I know not when, or in what far land  
We met." He rose then, took her hand, and bowed.  
"Goddess," said he, "I await your command."  
Though outwardly, he kept his calm seeming  
Within, Harold's heart and mind were teeming.

"No Goddess, but a Fairy Queen are we,"  
Said Maeve, her voice like silk and honeyed wine.  
"And thou art him that may soon set us free,  
For thy noble blood is nigh to our line."  
She bit her lip until it bled. Quoth she,  
"One kiss, to set in motion our design.  
Let the long, slow work of our blood be done:  
At last, our time in Bedlam shall be run."

Harold was wild, and something of a rake.  
He neither paused, nor gave any great thought  
But said: "From one so fair, a kiss I'll take,  
Or damn me for a coward and a sot."  
Queen Maeve kissed him then, for her freedom's sake,  
And thus to Harold fell the Champion's lot.  
Queen Maeve's blood on his lips like a fire blazed  
The Champion fell back, dumbstruck and amazed.

At once, he knew the secrets of the air,  
 The secret tongue of every fowl and beast;  
 The arts by which men's wits to swift ensnare,  
 The Deeds of the Fianna, down to the least.  
 He could track a falcon unto its lair;  
 Allay the spirits as well as a priest.  
 As he kenned the depth of the Champion's gift  
 Harold knew wonder, and felt his heart lift.

"I am humbled," said he, "Great Lady Maeve  
 This gift is beyond my worth. I shall serve  
 As Bedlam's true Champion, though but a knave  
 Am I, and much more does Bedlam deserve.  
 I am yours. I will learn. I can be brave,  
 If my worthless life somehow may preserve  
 You, I am content to die here and now.  
 Command me! I am your servant, I vow."

"Thy life is thine own," said the Queen. "We need  
 But a drop of thy precious blood, as we  
 Gave unto thee, and we shall make all speed  
 To fly this Bedlam, this world, and be free."  
 Right carefully Harold her words did heed,  
 And liked him little what he heard. Said he,  
 "I know you for the very last Fay Queen.  
 Should you leave this good Earth, what might it mean?"

"All things end," said Maeve. "Long since, our kind fled  
 This world. We alone stayed, loving too well  
 Thy folk, Harold. Yet most we loved are dead;  
 Long years may turn a heaven to a hell.  
 For just this one purpose, you were bred  
 Good sir. Thy blood we beg, to break the spell."  
 She offered him a tiny, silvered blade.  
 Harold shook his head and withdrew, dismayed.

*Fianna – the legendary  
 band of Irish heroes under  
 the giant-slaying Fionn  
 Mac Chulaim, or Finn  
 Mac Cool. No hero could  
 join the Fianna except that  
 he first mastered a set of  
 heroic deeds relating to  
 poetry, combat, and  
 athleticism.*



“My Queen, this must not be,” the Champion cried.  
 “By your grace does all earthly magic flow  
 And you leave, ‘twill be like all magic died,  
 And the world left to men like this Monro.  
 This power I am granted must be tried!  
 By my new strength I will free you. I go!”  
 Heady power but fuels a young man’s rage.  
 Wisdom is the sad provenance of age.

Good as his word, the Champion straitly fled  
 Bedlam. Light as thistledown, swift as air  
 No sound of footfall marked his stealthy tread.  
 The Lady White and Queen Maeve knew not where  
 Harold went. “It matters not,” the Queen said.  
 “He will return. His art is ours, and there  
 Is no means by which he may best Monro.  
 Harold will soon learn as much. This we know.”

Hearing this, the Seer’s heart in darkness fell;  
 She slipped away, seeking silence for thought.  
 The Champion Harold – she loved him right well;  
 If by the Iron Doctor he was caught  
 Untried in his new power, who could tell  
 What fearsome disaster might there be wrought?  
 The deadly gift of Love: what is its worth  
 If your one Love be riven from this earth?

In fear for young Harold’s life, the Seer went  
 To spy on the Iron Doctor, Monro  
 And thus to discover his fell intent  
 For Bedlam, the Queen, and Harold, her beau.  
 To the lairs ‘neath Bedlam she made descent  
 Where before she had not courage to go.  
 Swift, silent and puissant was the blind Seer  
 But under Bedlam lay Monro – and Fear.



Within those catacombs so dark and deep  
Monro worked long upon his new machine.  
With iron, steam and lightning he would sweep  
Aside the arts of Bedlam and her Queen  
Stealing knowledge and power, thus to keep  
His fame and good fortune forever green.  
No magic in that dark world of Monro;  
Only Science that he did not yet know.

Silent as a shadow, the Seer crept near  
But she recked without Mesmer and his art.  
As she sidled in, close enough to hear  
A sharp sound from behind gave her a start.  
“Behold, Monro,” cried Mesmer. “I do fear  
We are discovered. Who is this young tart?”  
She sought into the darkness there to slip  
But Mesmer seized her with an iron grip.

Said the Iron Doctor, “’Tis Jenny White  
A simple lass employed in Bethlem here;  
A laundry-maid, and long bereft of sight.  
Perhaps she is lost. Yet certes, ‘tis queer  
That a lost maid should show so little fright.  
Do you think her more than she might appear?”  
“Aye,” said Mesmer. “She is no simple maid.  
Come, little Jenny! Cease this dull charade!”

The Seer cast about for means of escape  
But Mesmer’s arts befogged her subtle gaze,  
Trapping her. Said Monro, “A plan takes shape!  
Let us subject her to the machine’s rays.  
Quickly now: her body we must undrape  
Do you thus, whilst I make ready the stays.”  
Thus, while by the wizard Mesmer tight gripped  
The Seer was bound to the machine – and stripped.

With lightnings from a mighty leyden jar  
 Monro's machine held fast the Seer's form  
 On a silver surface that flowed like tar  
 Whereat a myriad blue sparks did swarm  
 A darkling sky lit with ev'ry star  
 Purposed the helpless woman to harm.  
 As across her skin the bright sparks did stream  
 The Seer struggled, drew breath, began to scream.

Monro spun a wheel of brass on the wall  
 As the Seer's cries shrilled ever higher  
 She arched, and broke, to quiver asprawl  
 The Iron Doctor's machine, fell and dire  
 From which now silver'd metal strands did crawl  
 Deadly serpents wrought of living wire.  
 They slither'd o'er her face and sought their prize  
 Finding at last her white and sightless eyes.

Settling there, they fastened leech-like to their  
 Task, divining of the Seer's thoughts what might  
 Interest their maker. Thence to share  
 With him the secrets of the victim's sight,  
 Rose a second metal serpent to snare  
 The Iron Doctor's eyes, and hold them tight.  
 And with Fay magic, with lightning and fear  
 Monro saw Bedlam with eyes of a Seer.

Of this scene, good conscience shall speak no more.  
 Let us instead to Champion Harold fly  
 For he had taken his new arts to war  
 The unjust powers of Mammon to try.  
 In the name of Ludd, he joined with the poor  
 Of Leicester, breaking frames with hue and cry.  
 The soldiers chased him round and back again  
 In vain. That name will be revered by men!

*Leyden Jar – an early and primitive form of capacitor capable of storing relatively large charges of static electricity. Leyden jars played a major role in early experimentation in electricity. The writer's description of some kind of device apparently powered by a leyden jar is surprisingly suggestive of more modern technological developments.*

*Ludd – the recurrence of this legendary hero's name is particularly interesting when coupled with the "frame-breakers", those workers who protested against the new steam-powered fabric mills by smashing the equipment. At approximately this time, the anti-technological movement whose adherents are called "Luddites" arose, a word still in use today. Their leader, often called Ned Ludd, has long been presumed to be nothing more than a story designed to confound the authorities.*

They set after Harold with horse and hound,  
 Torches and muskets in their hands. They burned  
 The woods and fields, but his art did confound  
 Their senses, until bewildered, they turned  
 Upon their own tracks, and again turned round  
 And then at last they fled, their lesson learned.  
 Then to the people Harold spoke. He sought  
 To rouse them, and lead those for whom he fought.

With glamour, Harold changed his outward guise  
 That none might divine his true face or name.  
 Yet for all his might, he found no allies,  
 None who would rise, and help him play the game.  
 Boldly did they shout and make great outcries,  
 But confronted, they all crept away hame.  
 Ev'ry man's a rebel with drink in hand,  
 Yet when pikes are lifted, where the firebrand?

Said Harold, "My folly now is quite clear.  
 I cannot sway the hearts or minds of men  
 Where such already are governed by fear.  
 Mayhap there is more to being Champion  
 Than first I thought. I must be gone from here.  
 When I learn more, I may yet come again."  
 Some deeper knowledge of his role to glean  
 Harold returned to Bedlam, and the Queen.

#### CANTO VI

Yet in St Georges field, all was not well.  
 Returning, the Champion heard awful cries  
 Of fear, and saw a kind of hidden Hell  
 Unleashed on Bedlam. No mere mortal eyes  
 Might pierce the Fairy Queen's concealing spell  
 But his fairy blood had made Harold wise.  
 Drawing forth his blade of good English steel  
 The Champion prepared for a new ordeal.

*Hame – another Scots word meaning 'home', or homeward. The recurrence of Scots words in the poem suggests strongly that the original writer was more familiar with Scots vernacular than were most literate Englishmen of the day.*

Within Bethlem's walls that night chaos reigned  
 Supreme. Basketmen and inmates alike  
 Shrieked and howled. Some there wept with terror  
 unfeigned

As the Iron Doctor essayed to strike  
 Against all of Bedlam's Court that remained,  
 Ferocious as any bloody-billed shrike  
 With lightning, with cold iron and with steam  
 Monro sought to fulfil his bitter dream.

The foul wizard Mesmer broke the Seer's will  
 Upon the rack of Monro's fell machine  
 Yet even in breaking she worked him ill  
 Stopping his life's-blood with a word unclean  
 Sullyng her Fay art that she might kill  
 Such a vile man, a true human gangrene.  
 Had his forebear's curse not shielded Monro  
 Belike she would have worked him mighty woe.

Alas. Mazed and confounded, the Seer spoke  
 As if to her Queen, while Monro took heed.  
 In her dark dream, helpless until she woke,  
 The Seer revealed all that Monro might need:  
 Bedlam, the Court and Queen, the magic yoke  
 Created by James Monro's love-struck deed.  
 Even the Champion's secret she laid bare  
 Stripped, helpless, in the Doctor's secret lair.

Triumphant, the Iron Doctor laughed loud.  
 "A new world of science is mine," quoth he.  
 "Whole new realms of learning, vast and unploughed!  
 O, if grandfather was but here to see  
 I have no doubt he would be deeply proud  
 Of all that's come of his love's mystery."  
 Then donned Monro his silver armour bright  
 And went forth to challenge all Bedlam's might.

*Basketmen – the lower  
 grades of attendant or  
 orderly in Bethlem were  
 known as Basket-men. I  
 have not been able to  
 determine why this is so.*

*Shrike – any of a group of  
 birds noted for capturing  
 insects and small animals  
 as their prey, and then  
 impaling the creatures on  
 thorns as a kind of larder.*

Shielded from Fay magic by the old curse  
The Iron Doctor feared no hurt nor harm  
But strode ahead, his metal visage fierce  
As the Bedlam Court sounded the alarm.  
First to fall was the young Lord Love-A-Verse  
Who sought to stay the Doctor with a charm.  
With iron strength, Monro unleashed his ire  
And Love-A-Verse fell, wreathed in darkling fire.

Next came Nimble Jack Two-Straw, a knave-lord  
Of the Chilterns, and Lady Cocklesprite  
Her willow-wand deadly as any sword.  
Half-blood Fay of considerable might  
They lay on with skill, until Monro roared,  
His armour all ablaze with arcane light.  
Honour unto them! How bravely they fought  
In defense of their Queen, and Bedlam Court.

With lightning, the Doctor felled noble Jack  
Cast Cocklesprite aside like a rag doll.  
Deep into Bedlam he drove his attack  
Driving the Court before him, one and all.  
Dismayed and leaderless, the host drew back.  
Despite their rage, the Doctor would not fall.  
Striding onwards like a battle machine  
Seeking the heart of Bedlam Court: her Queen.

Came Harold then unto the bitter fray  
The battle-light aglow in his dark eyes  
A true and puissant champion of the Fay.  
To take the Iron Doctor by surprise  
Was his intent, but standing in his way  
Found the Seer. O hear her piteous cries!  
Still weak and wan from her recent defeat  
She keened, and threw herself at Harold's feet.

“What’s this, Lady?” he said, helping her stand.  
 “Bedlam is in tatters. Whither the Queen?”  
 The Seer tottered, and held tight to his hand.  
 “We are worsted,” said she. “His fell machine  
 Bound me till I broke, weak and all unmanned.  
 Its power is fearsome, foul and unclean.  
 The Iron Doctor now knows all, I fear.  
 He will destroy you. Get you gone from here!”

“By my troth I swear it shall not be said,”  
 Cried Harold, his good sword raised up on high,  
 “That Bedlam’s Champion from the battle fled,  
 Nor left the last Queen of Fairy to die  
 Alone, unwarded. Better I were dead!  
 For Bedlam!” He roared out the battle cry.  
 Sword flashing, deeper in did Harold go  
 Seeking the Iron Doctor: Tom Monro.

*Troth – loyalty, pledged  
 word, faithfulness.*

Past corpses, through the wrack the Champion strode  
 Calling to his nemesis as he went,  
 Following sounds of battle that echoed  
 From Bethlem’s walls, with cries of great lament.  
 Upon sighting his quarry, Harold slowed,  
 And boldly announced his warlike intent.  
 “I am Bedlam’s Champion, thou vile Doctor  
 You shall rue the day that e’er you mocked her!”

The shattered host of Bedlam drew away,  
 To the shadows where they might take their rest  
 Leaving their lone Champion to hold the fray  
 In the hopes that his Fay-borne strength might best  
 What they could not, else Monro won the day.  
 Harold at once put Monro to the test.  
 Calling up a verminous plague-rat horde  
 He bade them put the Doctor to the sword.



The rat-king glared with eyes of poison red  
 And bowed to Harold. "You may not ask this  
 Of us. Thy power is the Queen's," he said  
 "And this Monro is protected by his  
 Grandsire's cunning curse. Until you have bled  
 And freed her, the Doctor may yet dismiss  
 All Fay power." The rat-king bowed once more  
 And led his horde of vermin to the door.

The Iron Doctor made a bow, and spoke:  
 "I know you, Harold, a poet and Lord  
 Of the realm. Join me, and in one swift stroke  
 We can end this most unseemly discord.  
 Much I have learned already. The dark yoke  
 Of ignorance upon man, long deplored  
 May at last be raised from our minds and hearts  
 If you will help me master the Fay arts."

Spoke Harold: "Master and Champion am I  
 Already by grace of Bedlam's Fay Queen.  
 I need nothing from you, saving to try  
 My Fay-born skill against your fell machine  
 And stolen arts. Lay on, fiend. You shall die  
 For the horrors that in Bethlem I have seen."  
 Drawing forth his good sword of shining steel  
 The Champion set upon Monro with zeal.

The Iron Doctor stood firm in his maille  
 Of Fay silver, proof against any blade  
 E'er smithed by mortal man. It did not fail  
 Against Harold, who cursed aloud and made  
 Another stroke that glanced from Monro's scale.  
 Yet the Champion battled on, undismayed.  
 For upon one arm, at the end distal  
 Our hero brandished a loaded pistol!

*Rat-king – a medieval superstition held that rat infestations were led and ruled over by rat-kings, conglomerations of rats inextricably knotted together at the tail. The number of individual rats in a rat-king was variable, but supposedly a rat-king could have the intellect of a human being, or even better.*

*Maille – an archaic term for armour, deriving from old Norman French. The word 'chain-mail' has its origins here.*

Harold's pistol discharged in smoke and flame.  
 This close to his target, he could not miss  
 But the Iron Doctor stood, just the same.  
 Then Harold heard a rising, crackling hiss  
 As Munro lashed out with his lightning tame,  
 And the Champion fell to the lightning's kiss!  
 He writhed on the floor, his body entire  
 Become a great mass of Saint Elmo's fire.

"One final chance," said Doctor Tom Monro,  
 "To repent your foolish ways and join me.  
 There is no magic in the Fay, I know:  
 Merely natural science such as we  
 Do not yet fully comprehend, I trow.  
 Stand at my side! We shall make mankind free!"  
 Still the Champion would not accept defeat,  
 And with a groan, brought himself to his feet.

"Monro, there is no fool here saving you,"  
 Quoth Harold. "You would shroud the land  
 In iron and steam. Your machines would spew  
 Their filth into the seas and air. I stand  
 With those who love life's mystery. 'Tis true  
 You have learned power – but you are unmanned  
 By that learning. You have become a beast  
 Seeking only power; loving life least."

"There is magic in Bedlam's Fairy Queen,  
 Monro, that wondrous promise of glory,  
 Of miracles, wonders, marvels unseen  
 Since the ancient days of song and story.  
 You cannot reduce this to mere machine."  
 Bold young Harold fell silent then, for he  
 Saw Monro's lightning arise once again  
 And readied himself for death, there and then.

*St Elmo's Fire – an  
 electrical discharge  
 observed on old-time  
 sailing ships that  
 encountered powerful  
 storms. St Elmo's Fire is a  
 purple-blue light that  
 flickers around high points  
 such as masts.*



Monro raised his hands. The Champion's dark hair  
 Stood on end. Lightning crackled forth, but limned  
 In fulgent blue, the Fairy Queen stood there  
 Betwixt the two. The dire radiance dimmed.  
 A scent of scorched violets filled the air  
 And Bedlam's Queen fell to the floor, lax-limbed.  
 Her eyelids fluttered. Young Harold drew nigh.  
 "Free me, Champion" she whispered, "Ere I die."

*Hair stood on end – the  
 writer was obviously  
 familiar with the effects of a  
 massive static discharge.  
 Modern devices such as a  
 Van der Graaff generator  
 can produce this hair-  
 standing-on-effect at will*

Oh, what rage and sorrow then Harold knew  
 As the Fay Queen lay dying in his grasp.  
 "My Queen," he cried aloud. "What must I do?  
 I have been more treacherous than the asp  
 That fair Cleopatra of Egypt slew.  
 Stay, Queen, please! Let me now your soft hands clasp,  
 Tell me your wish. I am yours to command!"  
 But her eyes closed, and she let go his hand.

Then sadly spoke the Seer, blind Lady White  
 From the shadowed corner where she had seen  
 All that took place. "Her freedom is your right  
 Of birth, Lord Harold, and has always been  
 So. A single drop of your Fay blood might  
 Suffice, if your pride doth not overween.  
 She made you Champion that she might be free.  
 Grant her that much, before her life doth flee."

Harold pricked one finger upon sword's tip  
 Drew forth a drop of scarlet on the snow  
 Of his skin. He brought it to the Queen's lip  
 In vain! Already she had lost life's glow.  
 There was no spirit in her left to sip  
 The draught that, at long last, might let her go.  
 She died imprisoned, the last Fairy Queen  
 A victim of love, and Monro's machine.

## CANTO VII

When the candle be snuffed, where then the light?  
 With the Queen's passing, so did Bedlam fall;  
 As did Hy-Brasil, and Avalon's might,  
 And Tir na n'Og. Lost and gone, one and all.  
 Monro's armour crack'd. The Seer lost her sight.  
 The Champion lost his power, became small  
 Once again. Just a man: no more, no less.  
 But must a man be small? I do confess

That Harold, in that moment, raised his head,  
 And gazed on Tom Monro. "We have killed her.  
 Of our pride and greed, the Queen now lies dead  
 And all humankind is the less by far  
 For our work. What will you now?" Harold said.  
 "Will you build your iron dream without her?  
 Will you make others to suffer? If so  
 May the Devil take your soul, Tom Monro."

"A madwoman here lies dead. What of it?"  
 Answered the doctor. "Who says otherwise  
 Is a fool, and a liar. In no whit  
 The poorer is mankind, and I despise  
 This dribbling talk of magic. 'Tis not fit  
 For men of true learning. What tiresome lies!  
 'Tis true today some craft was lost to men,  
 But in time Science will find it again."

Then Harold broke his sword upon his knee  
 And spat full upon Monro's smiling face.  
 "I will not shed your vile blood here," said he  
 "For fear of sullyng a holy place.  
 But know this now: I take quarrel with thee  
 And all thy ilk, Tom. You are a disgrace."  
 He took up the body of the Queen, then  
 Passed without the walls, beyond Monro's ken.

*Hy-Brasil – an island of  
 Irish myth, somewhere in  
 the Atlantic west of Ireland.  
 Shrouded in mist, it could  
 not be reached by human  
 travellers.*

*Tir na n'Og – in Irish myth,  
 the land of everlasting  
 youth; home to the Tuatha  
 de Danaan.*

*Avalon – the mythical  
 fairyland to which King  
 Arthur supposedly travelled  
 after his death..*

No man since that dark day has heard or seen  
 Aught of her, or her like. Nor will again,  
 I trow. The fallen Bedlam Court did keen  
 Her passing long and loud, but Monro then  
 Chained and beat them. No protector unseen  
 Had they any longer. Natheless, when  
 A season passed, Monro was gone from there  
 And Bethlem given unto better care.

*Natheless – archaic for  
 nonetheless, or  
 nevertheless.*

No Champion now, Harold long mourned Maeve's loss,  
 And he cursed his youthful folly and pride  
 Knowing if he had simply born the cost  
 Of her freedom, the Queen need not have died.  
 His wretched heart by guilt and sorrow tossed,  
 He fled, his lands and duties put aside.  
 He went from England to another land  
 Swore thenceforth to live as befit a man.

*Went from England – it is  
 perhaps worthy of note that  
 Byron left England for the  
 last time in late 1815. In  
 Europe, he made something  
 of a hero of himself in the  
 struggle for Greek  
 independence, and spoke up  
 often against tyranny and  
 oppression.*

For what is a man? Is he some dull thing  
 Of bland Science? What of that deeper spark  
 That small voice urging him to strive, to sing?  
 What true man has not yearned to leave his mark  
 Upon the world? We are candles, burning  
 Gloriously in the eternal dark.  
 Though magic be lost, man still may be whole;  
 If he makes his frame a home for his soul.

*False fame – the  
 Parliamentary Inquiry of  
 1815-16 found Dr Thomas  
 Monro to be 'wanting in  
 humanity' towards his  
 patients, and in 1816 he  
 resigned, ending nearly a  
 hundred years of  
 association between his  
 family and the Bethlem  
 Hospital.*

Thus ended the false fame of Tom Monro  
 Trusted doctor to Bethlem never more.  
 And if of him, or Harold you would know  
 I shall wish you luck, and show you the door  
 My work is done. 'Tis time for me to go.  
 Of this story's meaning, one thing is sure  
 With these lines the Bedlam Queen's tale is done,  
 But thine, gentle reader, has scarce begun.

–FINIS–

**EXEGESIS – “THEORY OF GENRE AND THE PRACTICE OF GENRE FICTION:  
A TIGHTROPE IN THE DARK.”**

### **Introduction: Why “Genre Fiction”, Anyway?**

The modern writer working in the realms of popular fiction faces tremendous obstacles along the path to publication and the development of an audience and the shift to digital forms of publication – part of what it termed the “new publication paradigm” – have complicated an already complex challenge. Until the end of the twentieth century the business of novel-length fiction was supported by the back catalogues of the major publishing firms, incorporating a long list of literary lions whose works sold to generation after generation. These publishing firms could then seek out and actively support the development of new writers. The advent of digital production and distribution has changed the landscape drastically. As an anonymous publisher says to John B. Thompson in his book *Merchants of Culture*, “It’s become easier to publish and harder to sell – that’s the paradox. Any old sod can publish a book now, but actually getting it out to the public has become much trickier” (239). At the same time, popular fiction or genre fiction has begun to dominate sales (Greene) which erodes the profitability of “long tail” publishing as a business model. The rise of popular fiction is supported by new technology which permits cheap and rapid distribution of fiction in digital form. This suggests that genre fiction will continue to dominate the marketplace for the foreseeable future (Chambers.)

The demand for popular fiction is intensified by the consumption patterns of its audience. In *Popular Fiction*, Ken Gelder observes that readers of what he calls “popular fiction” (which he equates with genre fiction) are frequently rapid, serial consumers of their chosen material (41). However, as the shift to electronic production and distribution makes it easy for the readers to acquire new works, it also becomes easy for new writers to enter the marketplace. As Thompson’s anonymous publisher points out, almost anyone can publish in

some form now and as a result, it has become more difficult than ever for an individual writer to develop an audience.

Until recently, the pathway to publication and a potential career as a writer of fiction was reasonably simple, if laborious. One simply wrote, and submitted work for publication. In the process, the writer would polish her prose with the goal of catching the eye of first a literary agent and then a major publisher with a novel manuscript. I speak here from direct, personal experience as a writer whose career began under the old system of publishing. When I began, the roles of the agent, the editors, the publishers, the distributors and the marketing people were all relatively distinct and defined.

The new technology has blurred the roles once so clearly defined, and the associated pathways to publication. For example, it is increasingly common for writers to advocate for themselves. Where once a new manuscript would have been sent to literary agencies, now a new writer is more likely to submit directly to publishers and call on an agent only after receiving an expression of interest. Similarly, more writers are acting as editors, anthologists, assessors, proof-readers, and even publishers simply because it is now possible to do so. Advances in information technology have made it feasible for one person to electronically carry out processes which were once labour- and resource-intensive, such as typesetting and printing.

It is now increasingly difficult for the book-buying public to discern the difference between a self-produced novel and a commercial release from a large publishing firm. To confuse matters further, the big publishers are plucking new writers from web-based businesses associated with self-publishing, such as Amazon and Smashwords. For example, Hugh Howey's recent best-selling series *Wool* began with a self-published short story

released on Amazon's Kindle Direct, and ended with a six-figure deal for the print version from Simon & Schuster, as well as a film deal with Fox (Alter). Writers such as Howey have effectively become their own agents, their own publishers, their own publicists and distributors. Meanwhile, literally hundreds of new players have sprung up to fill industry roles in new ways: online distribution sites which offer ISBN numbers and slick packaging (for example, Lulu.com); pay-for-review sites which link writers to respected reviewers for a fee (for example, *Kirkus Reviews*); and less respectable groups who can be paid to provide positive reviews and feedback on Amazon and other distribution sites.

As a writer, I view this changing marketplace with both excitement and dismay. It is now possible for genuinely new voices to reach a broad audience without being censored by publishers intent on nothing more than the fiscal bottom line. On the other hand, the new marketplace is a mass of voices all striving to be heard. The overwhelming problem facing the modern writer of genre-based fiction like me is clear: in this new publishing paradigm, how is one to create work that effectively reaches and engages with its intended audience?

I hypothesised that a careful reading of genre theory might provide insights that could guide and direct the writing of fiction that would engage an audience. The assembled body of theory represents a resource which is not generally put to use by practitioners, particularly of genre fiction. The traditional path to publication is immensely practical. It does not include careful investigation of academic research into genre, nor encourage critical thought into the nature of genre itself. Nevertheless, evidence shows genre fiction is thriving in the new era of publishing, and it seemed likely that careful examination of the research on this topic would be easier and more effective than attempting to construct my own theories of genre from scratch.

This close reading proved to be a complex task, and is described over several sections. The first section deals with the necessity of selecting both a genre of fiction and a body of theory to work with. It quickly became apparent that identifying a genre as such was a non-trivial matter, and more importantly that theoretical approaches to genre did not cohere with concepts of genre which must be acknowledged by the writer/practitioner. In the second section (Looking Behind the Curtain: The Wizards of Genre) I discuss an audience-moderated definition of genre, showing how it can effectively describe much of the elements of genre which must be acknowledged by a practitioner, and I offer an image of the steampunk genre drawn from audience expectations and behaviour. Support for this audience-oriented view is provided in section three (Fishing for An Audience) by integrating the idea of the audience as an *interpretive community*. Section four (The Business of Genre is Business) investigates the role of the publishing industry in establishing genre and in directing the work of writers who seek to address a genre of fiction. Section five (Business Isn't Everything) discusses commercially driven fiction writing from the point of view of the writer, including an investigation of media tie-in fiction. Section six (Genre in Fiction: It's Bigger On The Inside...) seeks to integrate all these distinct, yet related elements of genre and proposes the idea of a *theory of pastiche* as the key element in the work process of a writer engaged in producing genre fiction. The final section (Theory to Practice: There And Back Again) shows how the idea of a theory of pastiche relates directly to the practice of a writer of genre fiction, and how it guided the creative element of this work. It also explores the degree to which writers are already drawing on the ideas involved in this theory of pastiche, and suggests that there may be more insights into theory to be found by closer examination of the practices of writers going about their craft. In and of itself, this research represents an



attempt by a practising writer of genre fiction to question what theories of genre can offer practice. Equally it is an attempt to consider what the rapidly changing landscape of fiction publication can offer the realms theory and its ongoing efforts to understand and explain the dynamics of the production, consumption, institutionalisation and industrialisation of literature and literary criticism.

## 1. Picking A Genre and Choosing The Theory

I planned to compare what I learned from theory of genre with the visible reality of a popular contemporary genre of fiction. I assumed that if the chosen body of theory was essentially valid, it should with some accuracy describe the visible, identifiable phenomena associated with that genre of fiction. In choosing elements of theory to inform my work, I strove to select works and writers whose understanding of genre reflected the issues that I, as a practicing writer of genre fiction, encounter on a daily basis: questions of marketability, of audience response, and of the role of the publishing industry itself as an influence on my choices in writing.

For purposes of this study, I chose the presently very active genre known as steampunk. Aside from being lively and publication-friendly, steampunk is closely related to genres in which I have worked, including science fiction, fantasy, cyberpunk, and horror. I expected to find that the body of theory would help me identify and understand tropes, techniques and practices within exemplars of the steampunk genre, helping me frame a work which addressed the requirements of the steampunk audience. In selecting theoretical works, I was guided by the fact that this study is about the practice of writing genre fiction, not about the steampunk genre in particular. I needed theorists who discussed the nature of genre itself, not simply offered an analytical approach to one or more genres.

It was this approach that led me to set aside the work of Tzvetan Todorov, perhaps against expectations as Todorov is recognised for his thinking on genre. Nevertheless, his approach is highly analytic and specific, and therefore its cross-genre application is questionable. For example, in his 1975 book *The Fantastic*, Todorov offers an exquisitely refined definition of “The Fantastic”:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know....there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. (25)

Todorov goes on to add that, “The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). Not much later, he carefully distinguishes “the fantastic” from “the uncanny” and “the marvelous” (30). Given such specificity in defining his genre, it is doubtful that even Todorov expected his observations to generalise in the fashion required by my study.

Todorov’s highly specific approach provided me with the first indication that the very concept of genre is far more elusive than I had assumed. By focusing so closely, Todorov was able to make detailed observations about elements of what he called “the fantastic” – but equally, he understood that his observations might not be applicable outside the very specific limits he applied. This specificity undermined my initial view of genre as a kind of theory of types. This concept of genre guides book-buyers the world over when they walk into any book store and look for the shelves which hold their preferred reading material. It is a taxonomic approach which sorts books (and other forms of narrative, music, and art) into groups that are related largely by content. Todorov’s views might at first glance seem consistent with such an idea, but if you imagine trying to apply such specificity to the process of identifying books in the bookstore, it quickly becomes apparent that genres as understood

in the marketplace are much broader, and far more difficult to pin down.

This idea of a theory of types is quite an old approach to the idea of genre. In his book *Genre*, John Frow traces it as far back as Plato and Socrates (55), while Alastair Fowler suggests that it “goes back to the ancient grammarians” (37). However, both Fowler and Frow state explicitly that this is *not* a useful approach to understanding genre. Fowler calls it “a venerable error” (37), while Frow suggests that the taxonomic approach to genre arises from scientific habit, and the careful, detailed classification systems of biology (52). According to Frow, such a detailed biological and taxonomic approach is not particularly effective for thinking about genres – literary or otherwise – because “genres are facts of culture, which can only with difficulty be mapped onto facts of nature” (53).

In rebutting this taxonomic view of genre, Frow raises two very interesting points, both of which are potentially of high relevance to the central question of this study on how genre directs and is reflected in the practice of writing. Frow points out that biological classification of species depends on the impossibility of interbreeding, but then cites Rick Altman, stating that “not only are all genres interfertile, they may at any time be crossed with any genre that ever existed” (qtd in Frow 53). Frow notes that in biology, each individual member of a species must embody the characteristics of that species, whereas the opposite is true in genres of literature. Drawing from David Fishelov, Frow notes that “in literature and in culture more generally every individual text to some extent modifies or changes the group.” (qtd in Frow 53).

In similar fashion, Fowler says that the taxonomic problem “seems intractable” (17). He argues that the character of genres is that they change, and that “Only variations or modifications of convention have literary significance” (18). These two closely related ideas

represent insights which offer potential direction for the writer. The concept of crossing genres is extremely important to the modern marketplace, while the idea that a new work must somehow embody characteristics of similar works yet necessarily differ from them is perhaps the most central idea to emerge in this study.

Fowler's approach to taxonomic issues remains problematic. The primary focus of his book is on the idea of "Literature" as an identifiable thing, and if he is quick to condemn taxonomic genres, he is equally quick to use precisely such a taxonomic approach to disenfranchise vast quantities of fiction from the hallowed realms of "Literature".

Our age has a great appetite for studies of writing that is hardly worth studying. Thrillers, detective stories, science fiction, advertisements, pop poetry, pornography; these and other kinds of Trivialliteratur are accorded a weighty treatment that nevertheless avoids, somehow, questions of value. (10)

This statement clearly demonstrates the pervasive power of the taxonomic model. Despite disavowing it altogether, Fowler nevertheless accepts it as a helpmeet in his search for "Literature" and "value". This alone is enough to suggest that the taxonomic model may yet have something to contribute to this discussion, though clearly something more is required.

An alternative to this concept of genre begins to emerge from Johnathan Culler's landmark work *Structuralist Poetics*. Culler clearly eschews the taxonomic model of genre: "A genre, in other words, is not simply a taxonomic class" (159). He goes on to discuss the very useful idea of 'genre conventions', of which he says: "The function of genre conventions is essentially to establish a contract between writer and reader so as to make certain relevant expectations operative and thus to permit both compliance with and deviation from accepted modes of intelligibility" (172). This idea has considerable importance, taken in

conjunction with Fowler's assertion that only variations of genre convention can have literary significance. When Fowler uses the term "conventions", it is clear he is speaking of conventions of the narrative itself: form, tropes, and techniques. Culler's frame of reference is broader, and leads us to ask: what is the full range of conventions available for the construction of genre in a written work? Can we determine the relative importance of these conventions in the process of genre as perceived by a target audience, and is there a means by which these conventions can be manipulated to enhance audience response to a work? Or to extend Culler's metaphor, can we "strengthen the contract" by effective use of genre conventions?

Turning again to John Frow and *Genre* we see that he depicts genre as a broad force, a system which has effect across the range of human social activities. At times, this stance appears to compel him to compromise with existing ideas on the literary concept of genre. For example, in the chapter on "Approaching Genre", Frow sets up the case of a newspaper broadsheet headline visible to passers-by. He points out that the gnomic proclamation of the broadsheet can only be decoded effectively by someone with considerable prior knowledge of the conventions of broadsheets: their purpose, their placement, even their typeface, all of which might well be viewed as elements of Culler's "genre conventions" (Frow 7). Not much later, Frow is willing to say that "genre is not just a matter of codes and conventions, but... also calls into play systems of use, durable social institutions, and the organisation of physical space" (12). Yet by the time he discusses the history of genre in literary theory, he is prepared to isolate the concepts of genre and sub-genre from both the semiotic medium (typefaces, print size, and so forth) and from what he refers to as "the radical of presentation" (kind of text, narrative form, etc) (67).

This presents a conundrum. Frow's description of genre as incorporating social institutions and physical space immediately brings to mind the bookstores mentioned previously, and it is tempting to accept his ideas wholeheartedly simply because they include such readily observable phenomena which are clearly bound up with ideas of genre as it is widely understood. In this, Frow is broadly in agreement with Culler. Frow states that "Genre... is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning... its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a piece of concrete" (10). Frow seems to limit his use of the word "genre" in these matters only when confronted by the venerable body of literary theory which already attempts to address the idea, but he is clearly not entirely comfortable with the structure which faces him: "One of the inherent problems with working with genre theory is of course the lack of an agreed and coherent terminology" (65).

At this point, some of the underlying tensions in genre theory become visible. Taxonomy is not a valid basis by which to conceive of genre; nevertheless, it remains the most widely understood, most widely utilised, and very possibly the most practical form of the concept. Genre and genre conventions form a contract between writer and reader, permitting the successful construction of meaning, yet works which hew too closely to genre conventions are "imitative" and "slavish" (Fowler 23). And even though only variations and modifications of convention have literary value according to Fowler, both he and Frow state explicitly that every literary work in some manner changes the genres to which it relates. It would seem that for any question a writer might pose on the topic, genre theory is capable of providing at least two opposing answers.

Regardless, Culler and Frow's active, process-based model of genre seems more

effective than the taxonomic model as a means of framing the idea for discourse useful to a market-oriented writer of genre-driven fiction. Culler's ideas on the range of genre conventions are not fully articulated, but appear to include a set of things beyond the narrative itself. Frow, meanwhile, narrows the term "genre", as applied to literature alone, down to matters of narrative style and content. Which of these two views is more effective?

Certainly, for the practicing writer of fiction, style and content must be pre-eminent as these are the only areas over which the writer exerts a significant degree of control under the traditional model of publishing. But of course, this inquiry was provoked by the fact that the traditional model of commercial publishing is in a state of flux, destabilised by the democratisation of the tools of creation and distribution. A writer entering the field now, particularly in the realms of genre fiction, may not simply have the *option* of control over factors such as typeface, type size, layout, cover design and marketing material. In fact, it will more than likely be *necessary* that the writer exert such control, unless she is prepared to pay independent professional contractors to handle them. All these matters, once the provenance of the publishing firms with their concentration of resources, now open up before the new writer. Ergo, it becomes necessary to ask: just how important are these non-narrative, non-content matters in establishing that "contract between writer and reader"? (Culler 172)

To answer such a question and to permit a range of deeper inquiries, one would assume that carrying out a Todorov-style examination of a genre (or possibly sub-genre, by Frow's way of thinking) in the wild would be valuable. Steampunk would seem to be a perfect candidate, but in the very moment of decision, the first obstacles arise. If we are not to follow Todorov's model in providing our own extremely precise and personal definition of steampunk, we face not just the question of what is steampunk, but we must also ask who



gets to decide what is steampunk, and what is not? How are these decisions made?

## 2. Looking Behind the Curtain: The Wizards of Genre

If we follow Frow and Culler, we should assume that the existence of genre implies sets of literary work which hew to more or less distinctive sets of conventions that permit an audience of readers to construct meaning from those works. But who is that audience? How is it decided which interpretation of genre conventions is correct?

Ken Gelder and Gary K. Wolfe both approach the vexing issue of genre independently, but both wind up moving in substantially the same direction. In *Popular Fiction*, Gelder explicitly avoids using the term “genre” in his title, making it clear that he is interested in the phenomenon of popular fiction as a “culture industry” (1). Gelder is happy to define popular fiction as precisely what it sounds like: the vast field of works read and enjoyed by the bulk of the fiction-buying marketplace. In other words, Gelder invokes the audience for a definition of his field of study. Nevertheless, he says quite clearly that “Popular fiction is, essentially, genre fiction” (1). It is worth noting here that Gelder also states that popular fiction is “...not just a matter of texts-in-themselves, but of an entire apparatus of production, distribution (including promotion and advertising) and consumption” (2). This is a vitally important idea to which we will return, because the influence of this enormous apparatus on the writing of genre fiction is absolutely inescapable, even with the rise of digital technologies.

Like Gelder, Wolfe turns to the audience for an understanding of genre in his work *Evaporating Genres*. He dismisses the idea of any kind of precise definition of the idea, stating that “the term ‘genre’ is used largely as a term of convenience” (1). From there, he quickly moves on to say that “Nearly all these readerships, though, think they know what they’re pointing to when they point to it; they possess a functional sense of genre as

something more than a sales category but perhaps less than an art form distinct from the general arts of fiction” (2). Wolfe here deliberately echoes a well-known quote from Damon Knight, a celebrated writer, editor, fan, and critic of science fiction: “[Science Fiction] means what we point to when we say it.” (Wilson, Mark)

This willingness to accept popular genres as an existing phenomenon, worthy of study, on the basis of a mass audience or readership is not only strongly relevant to the experience of the writer of genre fiction, but it suggests something we may be able to examine and interrogate in order to answer our question about the relative importance of genre conventions as exposed by Frow and Culler. If we accept Wolfe and Gelder’s approach, we can provide a reasonable description of the steampunk genre by investigating the expectations of the readership. This is achieved through the internet where fans and practitioners of steampunk disseminate and discuss their ideas freely.

Of course, this study is about genre, not specifically about steampunk itself. A study which drew conclusions relevant only to a single genre would be of no broader value to the writer of genre fiction than Todorov’s painstaking isolation of “The Fantastic”. Consequently, a history and outline of the genre has been duly composed by researching published opinions of the steampunk readership, but is supplied as an appendix to this study. For now, it is sufficient to note the major features characterising steampunk.

Steampunk involves a kind of “retro” approach to science fiction involving relatively low-tech modalities serving in place of modern electronics, photonics, etc. Steampunk favours clockwork and cogs, glass and brass and iron. In keeping with this, steampunk usually demonstrates within its narratives an artisanal approach to the design and production of technological items. Many fans of steampunk take considerable enjoyment from personally

designing and building props and devices with a 'steampunk' aesthetic, including jewellery, toys, and even modified computer and information technology. As a framework to support and expand these ideas, steampunk fiction frequently invokes the Victorian period, particularly in and around London, but also in the British colonies and on frontiers such as the American west.

Aside from these elements of aesthetics and setting, there are purely fictional elements of narrative which also recur. Steampunk fiction often incorporates romantic themes and subplots and often involves narratives reframing or re-examining issues of industrialisation, colonialism, and feminism. Steampunk fiction very frequently depicts a kind of idealised female character, liberated and made socially equal in historio-social contexts notorious for marginalising women. Not infrequently, even the narrative voice reflects Victorian language albeit in a somewhat streamlined, and modernised form, perhaps modelled after writers such as Jules Verne and H G Wells, both of whom are frequently referenced in discussions on the origins of steampunk.

Moving past tropes, themes and contents, the physical appearances of the books offer yet more commonalities. Steampunk book covers and other iconography (internal illustrations, posters, and advertising) frequently feature sepia-tone or otherwise faux-aged imagery. The art associated with these books often depicts clockwork devices, airships, or women in period costumes in situations of action. Even the fonts used in cover art and advertising are frequently pseudo-gothic, or otherwised designed to suggest period printing.

It is quite clear that the commonalities surrounding steampunk fiction go much farther than simple narrative content. Beyond the realms of the stories and their tropes, another world opens up: a world of costuming, game-playing, design, decor, art, and music, all of which the

participants identify as “steampunk”. (See appendix – “Steampunk: An Introduction and Brief History”) This broad iconography of steampunk plays a powerful role in providing an identity for the genre, and in binding and empowering the culture of people who take part in the genre. Ergo, any approach to producing material for the genre must take into account not merely themes and tropes, but visual imagery and social practices associated with it. At the very least, if the writer is restricted purely to the role of creating prose, it is useful to recognize the visceral elements of steampunk. The readership’s understanding of steampunk demands action and romance, cogs and clockworks and bizarre machinery, so the text *must* provide such, if we accept the proposition that the audience is responsible for identifying what is, and what is not steampunk.

It is worth noting that other academic researchers have developed a very similar picture of steampunk as a genre and a phenomenon. For example, Ekaterina Sedia, in *Steampunk: Looking to the Future Through the Lens of the Past*, notes:

Some will think of early steampunk, as envisioned by Powers, Blaylock and Jeter; others will recall the retrofuturism of Wells and Verne; yet others will shrug and deride faux Victoriana with its grafted-on machinery. The beauty of steampunk is that none would be wrong – much like trying to determine the shape of an elephant by feel, summarizing literary steampunk is daunting, and it is tempting to grab a trunk and call it an elephant. It is tempting to say that in order to be properly steampunk, a story needs to be an alternate history, or to be set in Victorian England, or at least have an airship or two. (2)

Like Del Rey, Sedia expressly rejects this trope-based definition, and suggests an alternative which she describes as “...operational – that is, what do these stories do?” (2) The

answer she provides to this question is lengthy. She suggests that “great” steampunk works confront an uneasy past with its history of oppression and science that serves to promote dominance, where women are chattel and where other races are deemed subhuman and therefore fit to exploit, where we can take things because we feel like it, where the moral code of conduct does not apply to treatment of lower classes. (2)

In their introduction to Neo-Victorian Studies 3.1, Rachel Bowser and Brian Croxall state that “Steampunk seems precisely to illustrate, and perhaps even perform, a kind of cultural memory work, wherein our projections and fantasies about the Victorian era meet the tropes and techniques of science fiction, to produce a genre that revels in anachronism while exposing history’s overlapping layers” (1). In the same article, they refer explicitly to steampunk as both a literature, and a culture (2)

In his essay ‘Steampunk: Looking at the Evidence’ published in Julie Taddeo and Cynthia Miller’s collection of essays *Steaming into A Victorian Future*, Jeff Vandermeer says “And all of this creates an atmosphere for publishers in which the term steampunk sells books. Whenever a term can sell books, it naturally creates fragmentation, contamination, and mutation of the term in question which is why thinking of steampunk as a kind of umbrella or an aesthetic rather than a movement is more useful” (301). For Vandermeer, steampunk is moderated as much by the publishing industry as by writers and readers, which view is necessarily at odds with the lofty goals of “great” steampunk described by Sedia. Nevertheless, it is this publishing-industry mediated view of steampunk which must, by definition, be of most interest to the aspiring writer of steampunk fiction.

### 3. Fishing for An Audience

For the writer of genre fiction the audience is paramount, and the manner in which Wolfe and Gelder turn to the audience to inform and direct their studies feels completely appropriate and natural. Yet as a scholar, it is necessary to question the basis on which writers such as Wolfe and Gelder do this. Is there a functional alternative? Is it reasonable to recognise a body of “popular” or “genre-driven fiction” *without* granting considerable agency to the audience itself?

Gelder invokes the audience precisely because he is concerned with popular fiction. He emphasises the importance of entertainment to popular fiction, touching on that idea repeatedly. (This echoes Lester Del Rey’s definition of science fiction as “dealing with the possible in an entertaining way”, from his *World of Science Fiction* [ix].) This key concept of entertainment, an audience response, becomes especially important in the context of the genre fiction reader as a serial consumer. Gelder cites Victoria Nelson’s description of the differences between reading Literature versus reading popular fiction, noting that she characterises the reader of popular fiction as a kind of addict (41).

Nelson’s view is particularly interesting because she clearly opposes the idea of agency within the readership. Nevertheless, her metaphor of addiction does not support the concept of genre as audience or readership-centric. Addiction suggests drugs: dealers, supply, demand, and ultimately helpless consumption on the part of the addicts. Nelson, however, asserts that popular fiction readers keep gobbling up more of their favourites because the experience of each book is somehow empty and unsatisfying (qtd in Gelder, 41). Readers of “Literature,” on the other hand, do not show this pattern of consumption because the literary experience is infinitely more fulfilling, leaving the readers fully sated. This remarkable stance

negates Nelson's own metaphor, since it requires an addiction to a nothingness.

Another writer who denies agency to the readership is John Sutherland. In his *Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction* he says: "But, like alcoholics, one was too many but a thousand not enough for the brand-loyal corps of readers" (37). Sutherland's alcoholic image sustains an idea of continuous, helpless consumption of something, whereas Nelson's idea of addiction to emptiness can only be wondered at. At the very least, one is forced to conclude that as serial consumers readers of particular genres of fiction are receiving some kind of enjoyable experience which they seek to replicate, even as alcoholics crave the effects of their drug. It is reasonable to assume that the experience in question is the entertainment of which Gelder and Del Rey both speak.

Yet does this make the readers simple, helpless addicts? It seems unlikely that any effort to depict the active, involved and highly creative readers of popular fiction as mere hapless consumers could be successful. Such a model runs contrary to ideas we have already accepted. Culler regards genre as a kind of contract, which metaphor implies negotiation, and the possibility of breach from either side. Frow goes farther, clearly stating that genre incorporates both readership and texts, and that both act, and are acted upon, and we can easily see this in the enormous, highly active community surrounding steampunk. But what exactly is it this audience is doing? How is its activity moderated by the genre? How does that activity in turn affect the genre? In a marketplace where the lines are increasingly blurred these are vital questions, and it is not sufficient to dismiss the behaviour of the audience as simple addiction.

Reader-response theory may help reframe the discussion. In his book *Is There A Text In This Class?* Stanley Fish champions the idea of the interpretive community in regard to the



production of meaning itself within the interaction between text and reader. It is Fish's contention that meaning does not reside within the physical text at all. He points out that

language is always perceived, from the very first, within a structure of norms. That structure, however, is not abstract and independent but social: and therefore it is not a single structure with a privileged relationship to the process of communication as it occurs in any situation, but a structure that changes when one situation, with its assumed background of practices, purposes, and goals, has given way to another. (318)

This concept of language as functioning within, and guided by a structure of norms is strikingly suggestive of Culler's genre conventions and the role they play in establishing meaning. It also bears a relationship to Frow's ideas on an educated audience as illustrated through his example of the newspaper broadsheet. Taken alongside the other ideas articulated by Fish, it suggests that there is some form of relationship between the two viewpoints, perhaps as though the two writers were approaching elements of the same phenomenon from different directions. Culler, as a structuralist, gives primacy to the text above all whereas Fish addresses the question of meaning by all but abandoning the text in favour of the readership. In seeking to understand the creation and location of meaning, Fish invokes communities of informed readers who have an appropriate understanding of language, syntax, and social usages and norms associated with a text. Tellingly, Fish situates the writer of any text within such a community (161).

The clear implication for the aspiring writer is that in order to create works which will generate meaning for members of a particular interpretive community it is necessary to be a fully informed member of that community. To write steampunk fiction that will engage a

steampunk audience, a writer must be a part of that audience: able to read and enact steampunk with the enthusiasm and facility of the fans. Writer becomes virtually indistinguishable from reader in this model, and it is interesting to observe just how strongly Fish's ideas are reflected not simply by the existing and formalised fan activities, but by that digitally-induced breakdown of the traditional boundaries in the publishing industry previously mentioned.

The interpretive community model has tremendous relevance and value when applied to genre fiction and the fan groups associated with it. Questions about the role of the audience – the strong and active fan-base of steampunk – and how their actions affect and are moderated by genre simply dissolve. The varied pursuits of these groups all become parts of the genre, empowering that contract to which Culler refers. The contract itself becomes something different: not an ironclad legal arrangement constraining a producer and a consumer, but an understanding which arises between members of a complex community with an array of shared norms.

The lesson for the writer is clear: more than simply knowing the major works, themes and tropes of the genre, one must be prepared to know, respect, and play an integral role within the community whose existence permits the genre to flourish, or may even be considered indistinguishable from the genre itself. Gelder is specific: "...writers of popular fiction cannot afford not to know about the genres they inhabit" (91). The word *inhabit* there becomes doubly significant in the light of Fish's ideas, implying not just that the works of the writer belong to the genre, but that the writer herself is an integral part of the interpretive community which organically defines and enacts the genre.

#### 4. The Business of Genre Is Business

Even when we include the role of the readership into our expanded understanding of genre in popular fiction, the model remains incomplete. Recall Gelder's insistence that popular fiction is a true "culture industry" (1), and his reference to the "enormous apparatus" (2) that surrounds it. If we recognise that Fish's interpretive communities describe the members of the active fan base of a genre such as steampunk, is there any way we can rule out editors, publishers, cover artists, and even well-informed book-store operators? They meet Fish's description of an informed and engaged readership, and there can be no question about their power and influence over the world of publishing. Gelder uses the term "processing" in relation to popular fiction. He means not simply the consumption of fiction by readers, but a range of associated epiphenomena: professional and fan-based magazines, websites, specialised reviewers, generic awards and organisations. The roles played by these elements in the continuous reconstruction and reaffirmation of their genres is vital. Yet while it is interesting, and offers further support for Fish's interpretive communities and their role in creating meaning. Gelder's examination offers limited insight for the writer who has already accepted the necessity of understanding and engaging deeply with the genre. This is not a fault on Gelder's part. As he notes, there is a lack of academic investigation in this area with most studies and writing aimed more at formal readings of the fiction rather than the industrial and commercial aspects of the field (75). It is more productive for the aspiring writer to examine basic assumptions of the industry itself for guidance on producing material which is likely to effectively enact the chosen genre. In his opening remarks on processing popular fiction, Gelder directs the reader's attention to Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*. Bourdieu ranges across several fields of study in examining the cultural, social and economic

underpinnings of the production of art, literature, theatre and music. Of particular interest to the writer of genre fiction is Bourdieu's concept of multiple forms of capital bound up with the processes of producing commercial fiction: economic capital, cultural capital, and what he calls "symbolic capital", which might be described as social capital which accrues to a practitioner from peers and others involved with the art in question (124).

For the practising writer, the immediate value of this model comes from Bourdieu's observations that genres (or forms of cultural manufacture) accrue capital for their producers in differing degrees. In particular, Bourdieu notes an inverse relationship between cultural and economic capital: where a genre offers high economic returns, the degree of cultural respect is relatively low, and vice versa. Illustrating by example, we can see that Dan Brown's works have made him wealthy (high economic capital) but he is almost universally dismissed by critics and literary commentators (low cultural capital). However, Bourdieu observes also that as cultural capital accrues, a book may continue generating economic capital for a very long period of time; far longer than the lifetime of an author in the case of books canonised as "classics" (144).

For the individual writer, this division of rewards between Literature and popular or *bourgeois* fiction calls for a choice, and serves at least in part to explain why a writer such as Margaret Atwood, whose work is replete with tropes and themes inextricably linked to science fiction, can fiercely resist being identified with that genre. Beyond any particular personal preferences, Atwood's insistence that her writing is not science fiction (Hoby) represents both a decision for a cultural over economic value-return on her works in the short term, and a calculated gamble on economic returns in the longer term. A book which enters the realms of Literature can continue selling throughout the author's lifetime and beyond,

whereas Sutherland notes the ephemeral quality of the “bestseller” model associated with the modern popular fiction industry (3). The outcomes of this decision can be seen in all aspects of Atwood’s writing: the narrative style that she utilizes, the publishers with whom she works, the prizes and awards she garners, the shape and texture and cover art of the physical books, and the audience which receives her works.

The implications here for the working writer lie in the approach to publication, in the traditional model. Publishing is a business, designed to run at a profit. As Sutherland observes – in support of Bourdieu’s idea of a dichotomy in the industry – in the long term, literary books may be more profitable than the ephemeral “bestseller” (18). Publishing firms know their business, and are aware of their markets and genres. There is no point, for example, in offering a gritty crime-noir manuscript to the romance-dedicated house of Mills & Boon. Publishers are as much a part of the interpretive community of a genre as are readers, and a writer must inhabit that part of the genre as effectively as they do the more obvious genre conventions.

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, and it is worth noting that Frank Herbert’s *Dune*, regarded as a seminal work of science fiction and perhaps a modern classic, was not originally published by a firm associated with science fiction, or indeed fiction of any sort. In 1965, Chilton Books was associated with trade magazines and auto repair manuals, and despite the monumental success of Herbert’s book and its sequels, Chilton’s core business remains essentially the same today (Chilton.cengage.com). The publication of *Dune* is as famous within the science fiction publishing industry as is the publication of Joyce’s *Ulysses* in the realms of literature: Herbert’s book was rejected by more than twenty fiction publishing houses before being accepted by Chilton. It is tempting to suppose that perhaps

Herbert skated too close to the edge of contemporary science fiction genre conventions with his work, and wound up producing something which acts more like a work of Literature than a piece of popular, genre fiction. This would explain both his difficulties in finding a publisher, and the longevity of his work once published.

In Bourdieu's model, symbolic capital inheres to the literary side of publishing, while popular fiction is relatively deficient in that area. However, Bourdieu built up his model through investigation of the French cultural and literary marketplace at the time of Gustave Flaubert. Gelder notes that in the modern world of popular fiction and publishing, it is entirely possible for writers to accrue considerable symbolic capital, and even cultural capital, albeit of a kind outside the formally canonised realms of high culture (91). Writers no longer merely choose between money and popularity versus cultural and social standing. The choice is now about *kinds* of cultural and social standing. Authors of popular fiction can hold a very high standing within the interpretive communities of their genres. One has only to look at the rise of pop-culture conventions such as the Supanova series here in Australia, which frequently feature writers as guests, and draw audiences in the tens of thousands who pay to come and meet icons of their genres in the flesh.

Another aspect of Bourdieu's analysis is of more immediate importance to the writer of genre fiction. Bourdieu observes that the length of the production cycle is a major indicator of where a genre falls in this dichotomy of literary-versus-commercial. As he puts it, pop culture works are

enterprises with a short production cycle, aiming to minimize risks by an advance adjustment to predictable demand and benefiting from commercial networks and procedures for marketing (advertising, public relations, etc)

designed to ensure the accelerated return of profits by a rapid circulation of products which are fated to rapid obsolescence. (142)

Confirmation of this pressure in genre fiction is easily found on the internet. Already authors are complaining of the requirement for rapid turnaround times on sequels and novels. At one time, it was accepted that a novel took about two years to write. Lately, the market has come to expect sequels on a yearly basis. Now we find that publishers are already reducing that lag (Bosman). This parallels what has been happening in popular cinema for decades. In the 1980s, the decision to film two sequels to the original *Back to The Future* simultaneously was newsworthy and completely groundbreaking within cinema. Modern cinema, however, is geared to turn out sequels of complex, expensive movies such as the *Lord of The Rings* or *The Hobbit* on a yearly basis, often filming scenes from several movies alongside one another (Media.newzealand.com).

For a writer seeking to position a manuscript, this implies there is considerable value in speed and volume. While one may not find oneself able to churn out material at the rate for which Lester Dent (creator of the *Doc Savage* novels) was famous (Mallory), one can certainly structure one's work to facilitate sequels and extensions. Further, this suggests that the "BFF" (Big Fat Fantasy) novel of 300,000 words may be less useful to the new writer than three linked novels of 100,000 words each which can be released, marketed and supported to greatest effect by the publishers. This idea is supported by Gelder's depiction of popular fiction readers as rapid, serial consumers of their chosen genres.

## 5. Business Isn't Everything.

Bourdieu is interested in what he calls the dualist structure in his model of cultural industry, and further illustrates the high-art/low-art dichotomy he perceives in his discussion on the differing manner in which cultural products age. Like Sutherland, he recognises that canonised literary classics have a long commercial life. In Bourdieu's model, the opposite is the best-seller which appears with great fanfare, has its moment in the sun, and vanishes. However, Sutherland notes that the bestseller can arise in any genre, including the avowedly literary (21).

That the dichotomy is hardly as clear-edged as Bourdieu might seem to suggest is entirely in keeping with Gelder's note on the social and symbolic capital available inside the complex structures surrounding modern popular fiction. Genre borders are diffuse and porous. For example, the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, printed originally in the *Strand Magazine* have all the hallmarks of one of Bourdieu's consume-and-forget *bourgeois* cultural products. The works were produced quickly and marketed to a large audience in an ephemeral format, and might easily have vanished from print like the near-contemporaneous Monsieur LeCoq stories of Emile Gaboriau, or been relegated to the position of curiosities after the manner of the detective fiction of Anna Katharine Green, who is now more remembered for herself as a Feminist icon (for her pioneering success in the field of crime writing) than for those works themselves, as noted by Maida in her book *Mother of Crime Fiction*. Yet in some fashion, Sherlock Holmes and the stories associated with him have moved into a position of considerable cultural status. If not true literary classics, the Holmes stories are nevertheless a vivid, instantly recognisable element of our cultural landscape, still in print, still being recreated in new forms with great success to this



day.

Clearly, it is possible for the writer of popular, genre-oriented fiction to hope for more than simple bestseller status. It is not even clear that best-seller status is required to bring a work into the realm of Sherlock Holmes – what we might call a “pop classic”. What this does suggest for the aspiring writer is that there is a reason to give consideration to more than just the generic characteristics of their work. The history of popular fiction is punctuated by writers who have achieved a lasting place in the literary annals. Inextricably associated with the genres in which they worked, their books remain in print and continue to exert powerful cultural influence often long after the demise of the authors. Alongside Arthur Conan Doyle, one would have to consider writers such as Raymond Chandler, Ursula K Le Guin, Bram Stoker, Mary Shelley, J. R. R. Tolkien, Jules Verne, H G Wells and Frank Herbert, to cite just a few.

The most well-known works of the authors listed above are respected not merely for their position within their genres, but for the qualities in their writing frequently associated with what Fowler speaks of as “literature”, as noted in modern critical responses from a range of sources. Such qualities include, but are not limited to: vigorous, decorative prose, engaging and deftly-constructed characters, and complex, thought-provoking themes of relevance to the human condition. None of these is mandatory in the creation of a Sutherland-described bestseller, but despite the exigencies of the market it is apparent that genre fiction covers a broad terrain. Margaret Atwood may choose to deny science fiction, but science fiction accepts Atwood, and therefore it is clear that a writer of genre fiction is not limited to choosing the bestseller path in order to reach an audience. The writer of genre fiction, therefore, may well benefit from taking part not only in the interpretive community of their

chosen genre, but in the community of classic literature, and has good reason to produce work of a high standard.

Naturally, this begs the question: is there value for the writer of genre fiction in going the opposite direction? Can one engage an audience effectively by adhering to the strictest possible limitations suggested by genre? To answer this, it is useful to consider media tie-in books: novels or stories which are written using proprietary characters and settings from popular existing franchises, usually from television or movies. These franchises or brands will be familiar to even those of us most insulated from pop culture: *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Stargate*, *Doctor Who*, *The X-Files* and so forth. Those writing the books are likely to be far less well known: Keith R.A. DeCandido, Christopher Golden, K.W. Jeter, Peter David and Kevin J. Anderson are hardly household names, though at least two of them have reasonably respectable careers in science fiction and fantasy in their own right.

In his book *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Fredric Jameson says: “the products sold on the market become the very content of the media image, so that, as it were, the same referent seems to maintain in both domains” (275). Jameson sees a blurring of boundaries which he regards as distinctly postmodern, and a loss of distinction between thing and concept. He is describing a situation where the narrative fiction is no longer a distinct commodity in its own right, but is instead indistinguishable from a brand, or a product line. This is precisely the case with media tie-in works. While the writers are paid well, all rights to characters and settings remain with the corporate owners of the brand, and the writers are required to follow strict rules of canon in their work. These rules have two purposes: first, they are designed to prevent any changes to continuity which might make further profitable tie-in novels difficult, and secondly, they are intended to prevent the writers

from alarming or disturbing the fan communities which purchase these books, expecting and desiring nothing more than a continuation of their favourites and the fictional status quo in which they exist.

These books represent what is presently the final word in normative genre forces. Not only are writers required to fulfill the regular conventions of whichever genre their tie-in novel nominally enacts, but it is contractually demanded that they write to a very particular formula in terms of plot, setting and characters. It might be suggested that each media tie-in franchise represents a strict sub-genre of its own, with genre conventions not suggested by an audience, but dictated in detail by a section of the interpretive community holding legal power over the intellectual property. In an article for *Clarkesworld* magazine, Jason Ridler writes: “Tie-in fiction is largely defined by its limitations. You can’t just kill Captain Kirk or give Chewbacca a sex change, no matter how awesome a story might result” (Ridler).

The restrictions on originality and invention are daunting, especially in the light of Fowler’s statement about the importance of varying conventions in creating “literary” work. It implies that these works stand virtually no chance of entering the long tail, and becoming a persistent part of our cultural heritage. And indeed, despite this practice going back to the early part of the twentieth century, there is no evidence that any of these works has achieved anything more than momentary fame. The interpretive communities that support media tie-in novels seem to be very much a product of their times.

Can a new writer build a presence, amass symbolic and cultural capital by producing such works? Is it possible to “springboard” from the position of tie-in writer to become an independent, recognised artist? Certainly there are authors who became moderately well known within their genres, largely for their media tie-in work. Terry Nation, creator of the

villainous “Daleks” of television’s *Doctor Who*, is one such. Yet while there are plenty of well-regarded genre authors who have accepted media tie-in work (James Blish wrote *Star Trek* novels; Jeff VanderMeer wrote a *Predator* novel; indeed, there is an entire International Association of Media Tie-In Writers), a search of the internet offers no authors of note who began their careers with media tie-in work. In part, no doubt, this is because the highly commercial nature of these novels means they are heavily supported by media corporations which can pay relatively well, and can therefore command the attention of authors who are already on top of their craft or on the rise. Nor are profit-driven media corporations likely to risk their money on untried newcomers, of course. Yet clearly, when a lesser-known writer works for a world-wide franchise or brand and the property remains entirely with the corporate ownership, there would seem little scope for an author to build an independent reputation. Further, the limitations on creativity and originality placed on media tie-in works place them at the extreme end of the phenomenon of genre which is under study. They represent a kind of boundary, a demonstration of the effects of genre as an absolute limiting factor.

## 6. Genre in Fiction: It's Bigger on the Inside...

With media tie-in novels this examination of genre theory and the practice of writing genre fiction has reached its logical apotheosis. While there is a good deal more which has been written around genre fiction, as Gelder observes the great majority of this material is concerned with formal readings of the texts, not with investigating the logic of creation, distribution and consumption. And yet even to paint the limited picture of this study, consider how far-ranging the investigation has been: all the theoretical writings cited here agree that the historical model of genre as a theory of types or a taxonomy is outmoded, and incapable of describing the mutable phenomena described by the term. Yet to build even a sketch of genre in modern fiction, it has been necessary to invoke reader/response theory, interpretive communities, sociology, economics, and even Postmodernism. All of this to do little more than establish that we can talk about a thing – the steampunk genre – and agree as to what is under discussion when we use that term. This unexpected complexity raises a simple, but very interesting question.

Genre fiction is much dismissed by the Literary and academic establishment. Fowler overtly derides it as *Trivialliteratur* (10). Gelder quotes Nelson likening the reading of popular fiction to an addiction (41). Sutherland compares the readers of bestsellers to “alcoholics” (37). Yet if genre fiction is such a simple, trivial exercise, why is it so very difficult to pin down and describe? Why is it necessary to extend the boundaries of conventional genre theory to get an adequate picture of a phenomenon which every practitioner in the field is required to understand intuitively?

In part, we can turn to Bourdieu for an answer to this. This apparent contempt for popular culture from what might be called the apparatus of processing high culture (to borrow

an idea from Gelder) lies, to a degree, with the dichotomy between high and low literary art that Bourdieu describes, and with the necessity for opposition and struggle which this dichotomy entails. For while the distinction between high and low (or popular, or bourgeois) literary products is for Bourdieu essentially a question of how they appropriate and acquire capital, he observes that both sides position and define themselves in opposition to the other (163). The struggle and the distinction is real but also inevitable; the machinery of high culture is playing out a preordained role in its devaluation of pop culture. In other words, the critical and academic entities associated with high literature are by definition required to reject popular fiction, promulgating an image of popular fiction as simplistic, moribund, and without deeper content.

Invoking Bourdieu certainly explains why popular fiction is dismissed critically and given less weight in academic investigation, but it is not sufficient to explain why the phenomenon of genre in fiction is so hard to describe within existing theory. My personal belief is that the difficulty arises from a powerful tension inherent to the very practice of writing genre fiction. It is possible to see this tension reflected in the divided nature of genre theory itself. Examining the theory, we see the outmoded taxonomic model being replaced by Culler's Structuralist ideas, and Frow's powerful elaboration of those ideas which extend the concept of genre to virtually all aspects of human social activities. And yet despite the power and flexibility of this approach, the taxonomic model persists for most of those who engage with the field.

Do genres define and limit? Or do they enact and enable? Here is the tension at the heart of genre fiction: the requirement for the writer to create a text which enacts sufficient of the genre conventions to satisfy the audience and identify with a useful genre structure, and

yet to retain sufficient freedom and originality to create a work worthy of the readers' attention. This struggle between the need for creativity and the necessity of enacting genre is as difficult for the writer to resolve as it is for the theoretician, and in a very real sense constitutes one of the most fundamental differences between literature and popular, generic fiction.

Consider a canonised work of literature, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*. Unbounded by genre requirements, Joyce writes as he sees fit. He plays with style, and with language, vigorously drawing the reader's attention to the rules that he chooses to break, forcing the reader with every shift and change to take on new means of reading and decoding. Joyce regularly distances the reader from the narrative, reminding the reader that *Ulysses* is a text, and in doing so Joyce offers a dexterous tour of language in action, a maestro's performance clearly designed to be admired.

Now consider the author of a murder mystery. The tale is bounded by genre conventions: there must be a murder, and a detective. There must be clues and false leads, before a final denouement in which the killer is revealed and the detective triumphs. If the tale is one of a series, there may be even more rules at play; routines the characters are expected to enact. Yet somehow, the author must inject a note of originality and engage the reader even while these inevitabilities unfold, for the author is required to entertain, and to give the reader a chance to submerge themselves in the story.

Meanwhile, the intended reader – consciously or otherwise – is strongly aware of these boundaries and conventions, for the reader is part of the interpretive community which enacts the genre in which the book is situated. If the genre cues do not occur in the text at the proper place and time, the reader's interaction with the book will be affected and her ability to

develop meaning from the text will be inhibited.

Nevertheless, the reader demands a *new* text. If she had no desire for novelty she could simply re-read previous works. Therefore, the reader must navigate this text, following and expecting the inevitable landmarks – yet somehow retaining a sense of the unknown, the feeling of exploration, of engaging with something new. Recall that the reader of this form of fiction seeks entertainment and escape (according to Gelder, Del Rey, Wolfe and others), vicariously entering the story through identification with a protagonist and forgetting, for a time, that they are reading and reconstructing a text at all.

Observed thus, the relationship between writer, reader, text and genre becomes a masquerade. The writer creates in accordance with a set of generic cues, but must *not* draw attention to them. The generic elements must seem to be natural, organic elements of the plot and style, or the reader will be in peril of falling out of a story which is too obviously generic. At the same time, the reader must enact those generic cues in the course of reading, yet simultaneously ignore the obvious information supplied by those cues: that the detective will confront the villain in the drawing room by the end of the book, the murder will be avenged, and the girl will be won. In entering the story, taking the role of a protagonist, the reader must at least pretend the same degree of ignorance, or once again risk losing the sense of immersion.

The whole process, viewed from without, seems almost a dance, a seduction in which both sides must pretend to be innocent while simultaneously fully aware of the intentions of the other, and even aware of the other's awareness. Both writer and reader in approaching a work of genre-related fiction must utilise something that might be described as a *theory of pastiche*. We may define such a theory as the body of knowledge necessary to permit both



satisfactory enactment of genre requirements, and sufficient extension of genre boundaries within a work. That body of knowledge clearly must include, but is not necessarily limited to, an understanding of genre tropes and content, language use, plot structures, text length, character types and archetypes. To move beyond mere creation of a manuscript, a functional theory of pastiche must also include an awareness of marketplace requirements such as means of printing, publishing, distributing and promoting the work as all of these are capable of influencing elements of the manuscript itself. It is not necessary to propose that readers operate from a radically different theory to writers; Fish's interpretive community model places both on essentially the same level. It is probable that the theory or model possessed by the writer should be more detailed than most community members, and it is probably desirable that the writer be more consciously aware of that model or theory, but fundamentally both operators utilize very similar constructions. The major difference is likely to lie within the notion expressed by Frow that all new genre works extend and change the nature of the genre itself, for writers must always be aware of the need for some element of originality or novelty, while readers have the luxury of being able to reject new elements, and return to the familiar at will.

It is worth considering the relationship between the idea of a theory of pastiche and concepts such as allusion, influence, and homage. All three of these may certainly appear within a work of genre fiction, but none are sufficient – either individually or together – to describe the entire gestalt which is necessary to place a work within a genre-space as understood by its audience. It is entirely possible for a work which is heavily influenced by another to fall within an altogether different genre. A notable recent example is that of E.L. James' novel *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Heavily influenced by Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series

(generally referred to by the reading community as paranormal romance) James abandons all fantastic elements while incorporating explicitly erotic writing to situate her work in an altogether different space despite its acknowledged debts to Meyer's trilogy (Hollywoodlife.com). James work illustrates the versatility of a theory of pastiche in that although James was consciously re-creating elements of Meyer's work (influence and homage), she was able to recognise that a strongly derivative work might not be viable and by abandoning certain key genre elements (supernatural entities), and incorporating others (explicit sex and bondage), she was able to move outside *Twilight's* genre to reach a very different audience. It is this same genre-awareness, this theory of pastiche which allows writers such as J K Rowlings to extend genres such as fantasy by incorporating elements from other genres – in the case of the *Harry Potter* novels, the venerable British Schoolboy tale.

Incorporating examples such as these from the existing body of art alongside the weight of evidence already explored in the theory, the idea becomes compelling. In the construction of a work of genre fiction, the author consciously engages in an act not of pure creation, but of re-creation and reassembly; in a word, *pastiche*. It is by definition impossible to be wholly original and still enact a recognized genre of fiction. The process demands an awareness of previous examples, past practitioners, highly regarded works, audiences, awards, and publishers. The task of the writer is to assemble enough of what the readers already know and enjoy to permit the work to situate itself in the desired genre-space. Yet the writer must also have sufficient knowledge to avoid outright copying or reproduction of these works, and sufficient skill to insert their own ideas, bring their own unique voice to mix without destroying the carefully crafted sense of genre. The writer *re-creates* the genre from known

genre elements, and extends it with new material.

The problem with suggesting that this process of re-creation results from a complex theory of pastiche lies in the fact that the term pastiche is almost a pejorative in literary terms. The word is associated entirely with the idea of imitation, rather than creation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines pastiche as: 1 An artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period.

Jameson is particularly scathing of the idea of pastiche, saying:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is... amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter, and of any conviction that alongside the normal tongue you have momentarily borrowed some healthy linguistic normality still exists. (17)

In Jameson's view as a Post-modernist, all writing and literature has collapsed into pastiche, and writers are simply mining earlier works, eras and ideas to present them, dead and sterile, neatly packaged for the purposes of commerce and profit.

This view of the idea of pastiche is difficult to reconcile with what we know of the history of literature. Even if we accept that there has been some kind of collapse of originality within the present culture, are we to regard modern works as the only true exemplars of pastiche? If so, how shall we describe the raft of thirteenth-century imitators of Chretien de Troyes' Arthurian romances? Must we insist on dismissing Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* as linguistically unhealthy and abnormal? Is T H White's *Once and Future King* truly devoid of laughter and satiric impulse? I would argue it is not the nature of pastiche itself which offends, but the process of commodification that depends on pastiche. In her well-known

introduction to *Tales from Earthsea*, Ursula Le Guin writes that “Commodified fantasy takes no risks; it invents nothing, but imitates and trivializes. It proceeds by depriving the old stories of their intellectual and ethical complexity, turning their action to violence, their actors to dolls, and their truth-telling to sentimental platitude” (xii). Clearly, Le Guin does not regard her own works as commodified fantasy. Nevertheless, her famous *Earthsea* stories invoke dragons and wizards, ancient temples and dark gods, and they are replete with the kinds of quests, journeys and coming-of-age tropes that we associate with the fantasy genre. They are a pastiche of well-known and well-loved ideas recreated, reassembled, and rekindled by Le Guin’s particular talent.

Identifying the process of writing genre-based fiction with a *theory of pastiche* does not preclude creativity, art, and artistic instinct. None of the theoreticians writing on this topic have stated exactly which conventions are critical to a work of fiction in permitting it to enact a chosen genre, nor how many conventions must be invoked to place a work in the desired genre-space. All agree that genre boundaries are imprecise, and that each new entry must necessarily change the genre as a whole. Clearly, a very significant part of the skill or art or talent of a writer of genre fiction lies within her personal theory of pastiche; her ability to select and enact precisely those conventions of genre to provide meaning and identification for the readers; her ability to push the boundaries without drawing attention to them; her capacity to extend and explore genre tropes and elements of language and style without alienating the interpretive community at which the work is aimed. Truly: a tightrope walk in the dark.

## 7. Theory to Practice: A-Roving with Byron Once More.

This study began with the goal of illuminating the practice of writing fiction through an understanding of genre theory. However, in examining the theoretical literature it became apparent that no one body of work fully described genre as understood by participants in the greater community of genre fiction, and none were effective in describing the writing process. The concept of a theory of pastiche emerged synthetically from the examination of existing theory across several areas in conjunction with my own experiences as a writer of genre fiction. It is an interesting, satisfying, and potentially very useful theoretical concept.

The idea that writers of genre fiction proceed from a theory of pastiche offers the potential for valuable insight into one of the most vexing questions of literary theory: what, exactly, is Literature (the capital letter signifying reference to high literary art) and what is not? For it is clear that a work of genre fiction is created under very specific tensions supplied by the writer's theory of pastiche which must include an awareness of audience response, and a willingness to direct the narrative in genre-moderated ways to permit the audience to derive meaning from the work. It is not clear, however, that a work of Literature must be similarly driven. From the earlier comparison with Joyce's *Ulysses* we are aware that Joyce was interested in actively separating the reader from his work, ensuring the reader remained apart from the narrative through frequent shifts in style and language. This operates in direct contrast to one of the foremost goals of genre fiction, that being the immersion of the reader in the tale to provide the fullest entertainment value. Does this imply that Literature may genuinely somehow stand apart from genre? Or does it suggest that there may be a recognisable set of genre conventions which potentially identify a work of Literature? Is a focus on the language and style of the text over the immersive qualities of narrative a sign of

literary work? One could certainly argue the case for works such as Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* with its distinctive and idiosyncratic narrative voice, or for Orwell's *1984* with its finely crafted Newspeak as an exploration of the link between language and thought. While both these works could be viewed as science fiction, both have long been treated as serious and engaging works of literature by the critical community.

Another potentially valuable use for the concept lies in confronting the hoary intentional fallacy. While the pitfalls of assuming authorial intent are well known, it seems likely that it would be possible for critics to comment usefully on, or even attempt reconstruction of, an author's theory of pastiche in relation to individual works, to a collected body of works, and even to works and collections of other authors. Without having to make assumptions regarding intent, the theory of pastiche would provide a useful framework for considerations of audience and reception, influences, and in particular changes of technique, style, thematic material and tropes over time.

Another interesting outcome of this research appears when we canvas the practitioners of genre fiction to see how their works and methods compare with predictions drawn from the theory. Major items gleaned from the reading are already understood and used by the genre fiction writing community, whether consciously or otherwise. Bourdieu's short production cycle, for instance: the most successful of the popular fiction authors are also often among the most prolific, and they are not slow to give credit to this in discussing their success. In the first chapter of his book *Death Is No Obstacle*, fantasy and science fiction author Michael Moorcock famously offered instructions on writing a novel in three days. Likewise, John Sutherland notes that Mickey Spillane could turn out his Mike Hammer novels in three days, "if he was pushed" (66). Similarly, we have already seen Gelder note

the degree to which authors of popular fiction immerse themselves in their fields and engage with their audience. It is unlikely these authors are aware of the work of Stanley Fish, but it is clear that they are aware of the importance of being immersed in the interpretive community which enacts their genres, and they are happy to communicate their immersion through their websites, blogs, and other social media presences. From these examples it seems reasonable to suggest that careful investigation of various authors' theory of pastiche might uncover more commonalities – commonalities which may well point to ideas not yet considered or discussed in broader literary theory.

While such questions are intriguing and suggest future directions for research, it remains to put the theoretical concept to the test. Can one proceed from a theory of pastiche, through the process of creating a work of fiction that successfully engages with an identifiable genre? The creative element of this study will – hopefully – offer a positive answer, but only after all elements of the theory of pastiche which drives it are properly understood. It is a work guided by an understanding of the steampunk genre it is intended to inhabit, and only by acquiring some idea of what 'steampunk' means can the relationship between the Queen of Bedlam and the theoretical elements of this exegesis be recognised.

Narrative length is the first genre constraint, as the limits placed on this creative work are awkward. In the marketplace that sustains steampunk, there are a number of common word-lengths for stories. A short story usually runs to around 5000 words. After that, the novella (15,000 – 30,000) words is a length traditionally appreciated more by authors than by publishers; too short to justify the expense of individual publication and distribution, too long for a place in a collection of short works. At 13,000 words the creative element of this study fits no common market, which represents a problem. I could have addressed this simply by

providing an extract from a novel, but such an extract could display only an understanding of content, style, and tropes. Instead, by creating a lengthy narrative poem to be used as an adjunct to a future novel, I have attempted to satisfy a range of elements from a working theory of pastiche on steampunk, and to show clearly how an understanding of genre can guide the inception and construction of a work of genre fiction which actively extends the boundaries of that genre.

This idea of extending the genre is important, particularly in consideration of Fowler's idea that extending the boundaries of a genre has literary value – and literary qualities may, according to Bourdieu, help a work enter the “long tail” of publishing. Extending steampunk without actively breaking out of the genre (particularly with a long, complex poem) required careful consideration. However, steampunk is related to science fiction and fantasy, and shares an audience with those genres to a degree. The idea of using fictitious books or poetry, attributed to others than the author, within a book is a staple of both science fiction and fantasy. (Consider the poetry and songs in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, or the quotes from the *Bene Gesserit Way* in Frank Herbert's *Dune* for classic examples.) To the best of my knowledge and the extent of my reading this has not yet been done in steampunk. Ergo, including elements from the poem as chapter headers to a linked novel allows me to push genre boundaries, while still retaining a recognised element of fantastic fiction.

Naturally, the piece does much more. It is a complete narrative in its own right, replete with steampunk ideas and imagery, and it offers a complex backstory to the proposed novel. Further, since the piece will be presented as “found poetry” itself inspiring the novel, the conceit of the novel as alternate magical history is strengthened, allowing greater immersion and suspension of disbelief, in keeping with the goals of genre fiction such as steampunk.



However, the complexity of the poem, the demanding *ottava rima* structure and the unusual language and vocabulary involved represent a significant risk; a challenge both to the author, and to a genre fiction audience. Personally, it is this risk and challenge which makes the work of value to me – but of course, it also satisfies Le Guin’s observations and those of Jameson by taking the proposed novel out of the realms of simple commodified fantasy or pastiche, demanding more from both writer and readers.

The poem also engages with Bourdieu’s ideas on a short production cycle. Since it is ultimately to be used as chapter headers in a steampunk novel, it is capable of re-use for sequels or other related works as there are far too many verses for a single novel. More: to enhance interest in the novel, the poem can be released independently as a downloadable chap-book, or even presented in full with illustrations for a deluxe version. In this manner, the poem permits both itself and the novel to be exploited in a variety of ways which suit the genre publishing industry.

The nature of the poem itself is doubly a pastiche. It is presented as a found poem which may be a lost and unfinished work of Lord Byron, who is a major character within the novel (and in the poem, lightly disguised even as Byron did with *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*). The poem uses the *ottava rima* structure that Byron utilised for his epic *Don Juan*, and strives to include both Regency/Romantic language and themes, and Scots vocabulary noted in Byron’s work (Calder 134). Presented in a work of fiction it is to be understood as a pastiche despite presentation as found poetry. This presentation is itself a borrowed element, a means of referencing Victorian works in which diaries, letters and poems were used to frame fictional narratives. Note also that the poem is presented in a faux-scholarly fashion, with explanatory glosses in the right-hand column to clarify unusual words

or historical points. This is yet another element of pastiche, another means of situating the reader in a familiar space which is nevertheless not what it seems. Finally, as observed earlier, by incorporating stanzas of the poem as chapter-headers, I am borrowing from traditions well known in fantastic fiction (but not hitherto utilised in steampunk) applying layer upon layer of pastiche to the proposed novel which, naturally, will operate from its own specific theory of pastiche.

In this manner *The Queen of Bedlam* demonstrates that a theory of pastiche is a valid – indeed, necessary – basis to the creation of a work of genre fiction. More importantly, it demonstrates that a comprehensive theory of pastiche is capable of much more than commodified, imitative and derivative work. If this study were to achieve nothing else, I would account myself satisfied if the term “pastiche” was liberated from its unpleasant baggage and celebrated as the complex, challenging and vital cultural process that my reading has demonstrated it to be: a thrilling tightrope act in which the audience is as much a participant as any of the authors.

## APPENDIX: About Steampunk

A simple web-search reveals a myriad of Steampunk bands, Steampunk conventions, retailers of Steampunk costumes and props, and of course, books. Lev Grossman, writing for Time magazine, sees Steampunk as nothing less than a fully-fledged cultural movement.

(Grossman)

In order to develop a picture of the genre, I followed the cues from Fish, and investigated the readership itself. Of course, even without the theoretical guidance from Fish there is considerable precedent for this approach. An example is presented by Lester Del Rey's 1980 work, *The World of Science Fiction 1926-1976*. Del Rey was a prominent science fiction author in his own right, and in 1977 with his wife Judy-Lynn Del Rey, he established Del Rey Books, a separate imprint owned by Ballantine, specialising in the publication of fantasy and science fiction. An acknowledged Grand Master of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Del Rey certainly could expect to be regarded as an authority on the topic; and yet the first sentence of the book is an acknowledgement of Edward and JoAnn Wood, whom Del Rey describes as "well known fans and experts in almost every aspect of science fiction" (vi.) Del Rey goes on a little later to state:

I am also indebted to the many fans of science fiction, too numerous to credit properly, who have labored with little or no recompense to prepare the indexes, guides, and collections of data on the world of science fiction. No other fandom that I know has provided so much valuable scholarship for the researcher. (vii)

Del Rey's book begins with an attempt to discover a definition of science fiction, and he spends three full pages discussing previous efforts to categorise the genre. All of these

attempts are based on content, and all are rejected. Del Rey states: “I found no satisfactory definition during most of my professional career, though I spent considerable time trying to find one” (5.)

The challenge which faced Del Rey in defining science fiction mirrors closely that which confronts the researcher who seeks to define steampunk. In fact, in *Evaporating Genres*, Gary K. Wolfe discusses genres closely allied to steampunk, noting that “From the pure perspective of literary theory, persuasive arguments can be made that none of the major fields discussed here – science fiction, fantasy, horror – are true genres in any taxonomic sense” (1). However he also goes on to say:

Nearly all these readerships, though, think they know what they’re pointing to when they point to it; they possess a functional sense of genre as something more than a sales category but perhaps less than an art form distinct from the general arts of fiction; for the most part, they seldom pause to consider it as a complex of literary tropes, cultural markers, and reading protocols. That functional, largely commonsense approach to genre is what governs my use of the term here. (2)

Fortunately, times have moved on since Lester Del Rey toiled to create a history of science fiction. Where he needed to rely on correspondence, on archives of mimeographed and photocopied fanzines, and similarly difficult-to-access resources, the steampunk community has taken to the Internet with great enthusiasm. At the time of writing, entering the keyword “steampunk” into the Google search engine returns approximately 36, 500, 000 results. This is, of course, a staggering amount of material, and gives some idea of the problem faced by Gelder in his attempt to discuss what he calls “the processing” of genre

fiction. The writings available online reflect precisely the kinds of thing Gelder speaks of: fanzines, blogs, criticisms, reviews, fan discussions and forums, awards, conventions – a dizzying array of responses to the original narrative material.

Filtering through such a mass of material in search of an authoritative definition of steampunk is clearly impossible. However, by looking to the origins of the term itself, and examining the early days of steampunk, we can get an idea of what the first members of the steampunk community thought they meant by the term. The first book widely hailed under the steampunk label was *The Difference Engine*, by Bruce Sterling and William Gibson. Published in 1990, the book followed on from the success enjoyed by both authors (particularly Gibson) as founders of the cyberpunk movement. Combining ideas and tropes from crime fiction and film noir with near-future science, cyberpunk represented a shift away from the long-standard vision of technology in the hands of governments and the military, the staple of classic science fiction for many years.

*The Difference Engine* explored similar ideas, but moved the time and setting to Victorian England. Sterling and Gibson posited a world in which Charles Babbage's designs for a mechanical computer were fulfilled, and the device used to revolutionise the era through information technology – albeit a technology dependent on brass cogs and gutta-percha punch-cards. With both authors being strongly identified with cyberpunk, the term “steampunk” was an obvious and immediate marketing point. However, the term itself had been devised in April 1987 in a letter to Locus magazine by writer K. W. Jeter, who sought to apply it to the kinds of works written by himself, James Blaylock and Tim Powers (Jeter). Jeter's letter was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but the success of *The Difference Engine* made the term steampunk widely known. Perhaps owing to the commercial success of Sterling, and

Gibson and their joint work, the market was quickly inundated with works labelled as steampunk.

The themes of *The Difference Engine* are very much in line with the definition-by-process put forward by Sedia (2), in which steampunk serves to re-evaluate the role of technology in history, but the works of the authors cited in Jeter's letter – Tim Powers, James Blaylock, and of course Jeter himself – were far less concerned with any political agenda. Powers' works, notably *The Drawing of the Dark* (1979) and *The Anubis Gates* (1983) were alternate history/fantasy pieces, although the latter work fused fantasy and science fiction by positing ancient magic as a form of poorly understood science. Blaylock's works, in the wake of Jeter's notable letter and the success of *The Difference Engine*, have shifted to centre upon the alternate-history adventures of a Victorian-era scientific adventurer called Langdon St Ives, and once again show no particular relationship to the process described by Sedia. Jeter's own novel *Morlock Night* (1979), referred to in his letter, was created as a sequel to H G Wells *The Time Machine*, with added elements of fantasy. Jeter's own opinion of what steampunk meant can be inferred from this quote taken from the famous letter: "Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective for Powers, Blaylock and myself" (Jeter)

If the originators of the steampunk label regarded their works as 'Victorian fantasies', and the idea of a political process arrived later, we are forced to ask a difficult question: *who gets to decide?* Del Rey's definition of science fiction is avowedly his own; a definition designed to satisfy himself, and presumably, his audience. As a Grand Master and a highly respected figure in the field, does he have the right to dictate what is, and what is not science fiction? Sedia is a comparative latecomer to steampunk, but as a writer of some note invited

by the publishers and the editor to provide a foreword, presumably she perceives her role to have a certain gravitas. Is it acceptable for her to decide what constitutes “great” steampunk?

In both cases, it would seem highly unlikely that a single operator from the community of the genre has the right to lay down laws or strictures which must be obeyed by the rest of the community. Indeed, it is the very nature of these communities that such fiat action by any participant is impossible. There is no ruling body, no high council, no authority of final appeal. In fact, what Sedia and Del Rey are doing closely parallels Tzvetan Todorov’s approach to what he called “the Fantastic”. Todorov sought to define a genre in terms comfortable to his structuralist agenda, but effected a kind of intellectual sleight: in limiting his discourse to works which fit his own definition, he essentially avoids the question of the validity of that definition.

Del Rey clearly created his definition to suit his own purpose, which was to write a history of his chosen topic, and openly admitted the limitations of that definition. Likewise, while Sedia may appear to be describing the broader phenomenon of steampunk, in real terms she is simply presaging the material within the book which follows her foreword. These are limited cases, and what the authors are doing is not setting limits to the greater genre, but establishing functional limits within which the works of their concern can be understood and examined.

Authors are only a small part of the interpretive community of steampunk, however, and that community has expanded far beyond simple fiction. As Lev Grossman observes, it now includes bands and music, conventions, magazines, costumes, specialty stores, games, props, comics, and movies, among other things. Nevertheless, the literature came first – and this provides us with a useful approach in seeking some kind of definition of

steampunk. By examining other parts of the greater steampunk community, we can discover what elements of the fiction these other avatars of steampunk have abstracted and claimed for their own, in order to be identified with the movement. In the commonality of such elements amongst the various parts of the steampunk community, we may hope to learn what it is that the steampunk community “points at” when they use the term.

A listing of steampunk bands suggests that such bands should display at least two or three of five clearly recognisable criteria: that they refer to themselves as steampunk; that they affect old-fashioned dress or style; that they utilise some elements of classical instrumentation; that they promote themselves with a fictional (preferably alternative-historical) backstory; and that their lyrics are “steampunk”\ (here taken as a combination of science fictional and historical) (Steampunk Wiki.)

The first item is self-explanatory, though intriguing. The next two are of interest: old-fashioned dress or style, and elements of classical instrumentation. In other words, Steampunk music involves individuals actually interacting with regular, classical instruments. This is very much in keeping with Lev Grossman’s take on Steampunk as a movement of revolt:

The same way punk took back music, steampunk reclaims technology for the masses. It substitutes metal gears for silicon, pneumatic tubes for 3G and wi-fi. It maximizes what was miniaturized and makes visible what was hidden. Where the iPhone is all stainless steel and high-gloss plastic, steampunk is brass and wood and leather. Steampunk isn’t mass-produced; it’s bespoke and unique, and if you don’t like it, you can tinker with it till you do.” (Grossman)

In terms of music, therefore, steampunk is at least partly about escaping from electronic



instruments and computer-controlled, highly engineered sounds in favour of the music produced by the traditional player/instrument process. This process is seen as old-fashioned or antiquated, but is championed by the steampunk community for qualities of individuality and artisanship.

The fictional alt-historical backstories are also important: the musicians are not simply performing; they are taking on an identity, and promoting a mythic alternate in which the audience is encouraged to take part. The use of historic/science fictional lyrics extends this process. It is overtly an escape from present-day reality; an escape in which the musicians and the audience collude. The music invites its community to take part in an idealised alternate reality drawing on chosen historical elements, and emphasising the style of the period, and individual mastery of the technical modes appropriate to the imagined era.

Returning to steampunk fiction, we find that according to Sid Plested of the online magazine *Suite*, steampunk is frequently characterised by several things including: a reliance on antique technology that is somehow able to exceed historical limitations; a romantic theme likely indicative of the fantasy parentage of the genre (as cyberpunk is less concerned with romantic subplots); and alternative histories in which pivotal historical events (the American Civil War, World War II, the assassination of JFK) are often altered for dramatic effect (Plested). So: the steampunk music community references alternate histories, individuality of performance and classical instrumentation, historical costume, fictional backstories, and science fictional lyrics/technologies, while we find that the fiction community appears to do likewise. Examining a third element of the steampunk community, the “cosplay” sector, provides further confirmation.

“Cosplay” is a term from the Japanese pop culture fan community. It is a shortening of

“costume play”, and it refers to the act of dressing up to reference any pop culture characters, themes or ideas. Cosplayers often go to tremendous lengths to achieve verisimilitude, and the costumes themselves can be extraordinarily elaborate, highly individual creations. Steampunk cosplay has become commonplace. Not only are aficionados dressing in generic “steampunk” fashion, but it is also popular to create “steampunk” versions of existing pop culture icons. The alternate-history element of steampunk permits cosplayers to reinterpret characters from almost any source: Star Wars, Star Trek, and the comic-book superheroes such as Batman and Spider-man are particularly popular. A commercial costume-shop website puts it this way: “Steampunk... combines the fashion and science of the Victorian era with futuristic technology powered by steam, brass gears and dials” (Costumecraze.com). Similarly, the e-How website, which provides guides and information on doing any of a myriad of modern tasks, says this of steampunk cosplay:

If the works of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells or Phil Foglio set your imagination spinning, if the sight of pocket watches, leather and aviator goggles make you reach for your wallet or if you’ve ever wondered just what might have happened if we’d stayed in the pre-electric era of the late 19th century you might just fit in well with the Steampunk culture. Steampunk replaced the cybernetics of cyberpunk with steam and clockworks, and usually reflects the fashions and aesthetics of the Victorian era, even though the stories may be set in an alternate future rather than the past. (Walker)

Once again, we see a focus on alternate technology based on steam and clockwork, and an emphasis on high Victorian fashion. The reference to Phil Foglio is interesting to note in passing: Foglio’s contribution to steampunk comes through the *Girl Genius* graphic

novel/webcomic series, and is notably modern in comparison with the first two, yet the cosplay community sees no contradiction in drawing from both. (Foglio et al.)

By this point, we have tentatively captured a number of qualities associated with steampunk in the eyes of its interpretive communities. We know that steampunk fiction – evolving out of science fiction and fantasy – is intended to entertain. We have established that it is often characterised by an alternate version of historical technologies and cultures, in which individuals can affect and encompass the major technical modalities of the times. These technologies are not limited, as they are in the real world, but can routinely transcend not only their own limitations, but even the theoretical limits of far more advanced 'real-world' technologies. Frequently, the settings reflect a romanticised view of history: Victorian England, the heart of the great British Empire, is a commonplace for Steampunk novels. Similarly, the legendary Wild West of nineteenth-century America is often co-opted for steampunk fiction.

It is important to recognise that this is quite a broad and open view of steampunk fiction. The narrow, structure-specific approach put forward by Todorov to investigate “the fantastic” could never encompass such a loose collection of tropes and themes which can – and does – incorporate a large and changing array of works. Yet despite taking this open, audience-driven approach it remains necessary to recognise that this view of steampunk is still a product of the here-and-now. Genres change, and this description of steampunk may become obsolete within a decade or so. Nevertheless, the here-and-now of the marketplace is the home of the author of genre-based fiction, and thus this conception of steampunk will suffice.

## A History of Alternate Histories

Armed with a functional definition, it now becomes possible to piece together an approximate history of the steampunk genre. Most examinations of the history of steampunk start with H G Wells, and Jules Verne. These authors utilised the science of their day in works designed to entertain, and to investigate the effects of science on the society of their time. In a very real sense, they fit Del Rey's definition of science fiction, but times have changed. Scientific knowledge has progressed, and ideas which were rife with potential possibilities in the days of Verne and Wells are today understood to be scientifically impossible.

This in no way detracts from the entertaining nature of their fiction. Verne and Wells are in print to this day, and with allowances made for changes in language and culture since the Victorian and Edwardian periods, they remain accessible and relevant. The same is true of a two other authors of the period who have affected steampunk: Bram Stoker and Arthur Conan Doyle. Stoker's iconic *Dracula* pitted then-modern medical science against the horrific threat of the vampire, while Doyle emphasised Victorian science over crime with his Sherlock Holmes stories, and tropes of science fiction in the works featuring his other famous character, Professor Challenger. It is worth noting that while historians of science fiction frequently speak of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an important precursor to the genre, it is much more uncommon to find such references in the history of steampunk. Science fiction has always accepted that science has a dark side. There is a long history of dystopian science fiction, and science fiction in which the exploration of science leads to ruin. Steampunk, on the other hand, is inextricably associated with the Victorian era, the height of the British Empire, and the almost unfathomable belief in a kind of manifest destiny which characterised the social order of that time and place. Steampunk romanticises its alternate-history

technology, keeping it individual, human and artisanal, while *Frankenstein* is a novel of technology outpacing and destroying its human creator.

Rapid technological change in the early part of the twentieth century drove rapid social change, brought to a head in the horrors of World War I which ended the Imperial Age. Culturally these trends were reflected in the birth of science fiction itself, the precursor of steampunk. The modern genre of science fiction was perhaps created, or perhaps recognised by Hugo Gernsback, with the establishment of the first pulp magazine dedicated to stories of that type (Del Rey 14.) While the works of Verne and Wells were often referred to as “scientific romances”, it is Gernsback himself who is credited with coining the term science fiction. The pulp era was one of explosive growth for science fiction itself, particularly its mainstream themes. While the positive attitude to science – particularly to exotic inventions and technologies – of this period continues to play a role in steampunk, there is little else from this time which is outstandingly influential on the development of steampunk. Not until the New Wave of the 1960s, characterised in the UK by the material in *New Worlds* magazine under the editorship of Michael Moorcock, and in the US by the *Dangerous Visions* anthologies under Harlan Ellison, did science fiction begin to mature, and explore different forms and directions.

There were some works which could be considered proto-steampunk from this period. Keith Laumer’s 1967 novel *Worlds of the Imperium* posits a British Empire which has expanded into multiple alternate dimensions – a continuation of the Imperial Age into multiple universes. Also in 1967, Ronald W Clark published *Queen Victoria’s Bomb*, which posits the development of a nuclear bomb in the Victorian era, potentially to be used in the Crimean War. Moorcock himself wrote *The Warlord of the Air* in 1971, about an adventurer

named Oswald Bastable, cast into an alternate reality full of airships, warlords, and vast, complicated, self-propelling war machines, thus presaging many of the tropes of steampunk.

By 1979, of course, K W Jeter was writing *Morlock Night*, and working alongside James Blaylock and Tim Powers, who likewise were creating 'Victorian Fantasies'. With the success of *The Difference Engine* legitimising steampunk in the eyes of commercial publishers, the way was opened for a veritable flood of titles identified with the genre. To illustrate: the Wikipedia timeline of publication of steampunk works recognises just seven novels, by four authors, all the way up to 1989. (I recognize that any Wikipedia reference is anathema in academic publication. Nevertheless, I remind the reader that we have established by way of Gelder, Wolfe, Del Rey and even Stanley Fish that the prime source for information on a popular genre lies with the readership of that genre. While Wikipedia may not be highly regarded academically, independent studies have demonstrated that it is consistently as accurate – or even more so – than *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example. More importantly, Wikipedia is created and maintained by the very people who are concerned by the information it contains: in this case, the readers and fans of steampunk. In short, Wikipedia represents the single best and most authoritative source for this particular timeline.) From 1990 to the present, however, the same timeline cites a total of sixty works, some of which are trilogies or series, or anthologies.

In 2006, the first SalonCon was held near New Brunswick, New Jersey. Intended as a celebration of Victorian and Edwardian fashion, it was attended by a large contingent of self-identified fans of steampunk, and in the following years became known as a steampunk convention. By 2011, the Tor.com website (the web presence of Tor Books, a notable speculative fiction publishing company) states there were 25 independent steampunk

conventions, and by 2012, the number had grown to 32. The picture of steampunk at present, therefore, is of a thriving, expansive, extremely popular genre of fiction, with a wide-ranging and active fan base.

### **Steampunk: a core reading list**

- 1) *The Difference Engine*, by Bruce Sterling and William Gibson. While neither author shows up again on any lists of Steampunk works, and both remain associated with the cyberpunk genre, nevertheless it is widely agreed that this is the novel which coalesced the idea of steampunk as a genre. Some of the works of James Blaylock, K W Jeter and Tim Powers were retrospectively incorporated into the canon, but this novel marks the effective point of recognition of the genre by the larger science fiction reading community.
- 2) Author/Editors Jeff and Ann Vandermeer: collectors of two definitive anthologies entitled *Steampunk* and *Steampunk II*, with a third anthology in the series due in December 2012. Jeff Vandermeer is also responsible for *The Steampunk Bible*, and the pair have co-written *The Thackery T Lambstead Cabinet of Curiosities*. Currently they are widely regarded as central to the genre, both as writers and editors.
- 3) *Perdido Street Station*: Author China Mieville: entering the scene with this novel in 2000 Mieville has now produced two further books in the same setting (*The Scar* and *The Iron Council*)
- 4) *Girl Genius*: long running web-comic/graphic novel series by Phil and Kaja Foglio. Having won three successive Hugo awards (the premier science fiction award, named for Hugo Gernsback) in the Best Graphic Presentation category for this work, they have now retired

*Girl Genius* from the Hugos, though they continue to write, illustrate and publish.

- 5) *The Steampunk Trilogy* by Paul Di Fillipo – the first book to use the term ‘steampunk’ in the title.
- 6) *Anno Dracula*, by Kim Newman. While featuring Stoker’s Dracula as a character, and utilising vampire horror as a major trope, the book – and the series it spawned – features on dozens of “Steampunk” lists across the Web.
- 7) *Leviathan*, by Scott Westerfeld and Keith Thompson. Already a noted speculative fiction/Young Adult author, Westerfeld turned his hand to Steampunk with this book in 2009, and it rapidly became accepted as a central work. First of a series.
- 8) *The Parasol Protectorate* series, by Gail Carriger. Opened in 2009 with *Soulless*, the series is already five books long.
- 9) *Boneshaker*: Writer Cherie Priest is noted for a number of books with a common alternate-history setting, and this particular novel is widely listed on sites for popular Steampunk works.
- 10) *Infernal Devices*: K W Jeter. First published in 1987, before the genre was formally identified, the novel has been reprinted by the Angry Robot imprint because of the current popularity of steampunk, Jeter’s importance to it, and the essential elements of this novel which makes it central to the canon.

While there are scores of other titles and authors which are identified with Steampunk to a greater or lesser degree, this list represents a strong mixture of the most prominent works and authors in the field. It incorporates stand-alone novels, elements of novel series, short stories, and even a long-running graphic novel series. At the time of writing, it is reasonable to suppose that reading this list of works provides a decent overview



of the themes, tropes, techniques, concerns, and genre markers (in the sense used by Frow) of steampunk.

## WORKS CITED

- Alter, Alexandra. "Sci-Fi's Underground Hit." *The Wall Street Journal*. 14 Mar 2013. Web. 26 Aug. 2013.
- Bethke, Bruce. "Cyberpunk - A Short Story." 1980. *Infinity Plus*. Web. 29 May. 2012.
- Blaylock, James P. *Homunculus*. New York: Titan, 2013. Print.
- Bosman, Julie. "E-Books Accelerate Paperback Publishers' Release Dates." *New York Times*. 26 July 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
- Bowser, Rachel A., and Brian Croxall. "Industrial Evolution." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3.1 (2010): 1-45. Print
- Calder, Angus. *Byron and Scotland*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1989. Print.
- Carriger, Gail. *Soulless*. New York: Orbit, 2009. Print.
- Chambers, Anna. "The Information: Genre Fiction Sales." *Financial Times*. 18 April 2009. Web. 25 Mar. 2013.
- "Chilton Auto Repair Manual | Online Auto Repair Manuals | Auto Repair Manuals." *Chilton.Cengage.com*. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.
- Clark, Ronald William. *Queen Victoria's Bomb*. London: Cape, 1967. Print.
- Couric, Katie. "E.L. James: How 'Twilight' Inspired Me to Write 'Fifty Shades of Grey.'"  
*Hollywood Life*. 17 Sept. 2012. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
- Culler, Jonathon. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Del Rey, L. *The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976*. New York: Garland. 1980. Print.
- Di Filippo, Paul. *The Steampunk Trilogy*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995. Print.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Short Stories*. 2 vols. New York: Bantam, 2003. Print.

Ellison, Harlan. *Dangerous Visions*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967. Print.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1980. Print.

Foglio, Phil, Kaja Foglio, and Brian Snoddy. *Agatha Heterodyne & The Beetleburg Clank*. Seattle, WA: Airship Entertainment, 2001. Print.

“Follow ‘The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey’ On An Epic Adventure.” *100% New Zealand*. 2015. Web. 9 Feb. 2015.

Fowler, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP. 1982. Print

Frow, John. *Genre*. London: New York: Routledge. 2006. Print

Gelder, Ken. *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Field*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Gibson, William, and Bruce Sterling. *The Difference Engine*. New York: Bantam, 1991. Print.

Greene, Meredith. “Indie Writer and the Ebook of Fiction” *TeleRead.com*. 20 May 2011. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.

Grossman, Lev. “Steampunk: Reclaiming Tech for The Masses”. *Time*. 14 Dec. 2009. Web. 11 Nov. 2012.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1965. Print.

Hoban, Russell. *Riddley Walker*. London: Cape, 1980. Print.

Hoby, Hermione. “Margaret Atwood: Interview.” *The Telegraph*. 18 Aug. 2013. Web. 9 Feb.

2015.

James, E.L. *Fifty Shades Trilogy*. New York: Vintage, 2012. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991. Print.

Jeter, K W. "The Birth of Steampunk." *Letters of Note*. 2011. Web. 15 Jan 2013

— — —. *Infernal Devices*. Oxford: Angry Robot, 2011. Print.

— — —. *Morlock Night*. New York: Daw, 1979. Print.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Modern Library, 1992. Print.

Laumer, Keith. *Worlds of The Imperium*. London: D. Dobson, 1967. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Tales from Earthsea*. New York: Harcourt, 2001. Print.

"List of Steampunk Bands". *Steampunk Wiki*. Web. 15 Apr 2013.

Maida, Patricia D. *Mother of Detective Fiction*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1989. Print.

Mallory, Michael. "Lester Dent: The Man Behind Doc Savage." *Mystery Scene*. Fall 2011. Web. 13 Apr 2014.

McMillan, Graeme. "Barnes & Noble eBooks Outsell Print Books Three to One" *Time*. 22 June 2011. Web. 16 June 2012

Meyer, Stephanie. *The Twilight Saga*. New York: Little, Brown and Co, 2011. Print.

Miéville, China. *Perdido Street Station*. New York: Del Rey, 2001. Print.

Miller, Claire Cain, and Bosman, Julie. "E-books Outsell Print Books at Amazon." *New York Times*. 19 May 2011. Web. 13 Apr 2014.

Moorcock, Michael, and Colin Greenland. *Michael Moorcock: Death is No Obstacle*. Manchester: Savoy, 1992. Print.

- Moorcock, Michael. *The Warlord of the Air*. London: Titan, 2013. Print.
- Nevins, Jess. "Prescriptivists vs. Descriptivists: Defining Steampunk." *Science Fiction Studies* 38.3 (2011): 513–18. *JSTOR Journals*. Web. 11 Feb. 2015.
- Newman, Kim. *Anno Dracula*. London: Titan, 2012. Print.
- Onion, Rebecca. "Reclaiming the Machine: An Introductory Look at Steampunk in Everyday Practice." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1:1 (2008): 138–63. Print
- Orwell, George. *1984*. New York: Plume, 1983. Print.
- The Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989. Print.
- Plested, Sid. "An Introduction to Steampunk." *Suite*. Web. 15 June 2012.
- Powers, Tim. *The Drawing of the Dark*. New York: Ballantine, 1979. Print.
- — —. *The Anubis Gates*. New York: Ace Science Fiction, 1983. Print.
- Priest, Cherie. *Boneshaker*. New York: Tor, 2009. Print.
- Ridler, Jason. "Writing With One Hand Tied To The Death Star: Award-Winning Authors And Media Tie-In." *Clarkesworld*. 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.
- Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury, 1998. Print.
- Sedia, Ekaterina. "Steampunk: Looking to the Future Through the Lens of the Past." *The Mammoth Book of Steampunk*. Ed. Sean Wallace. London: Constable & Robinson, 2011. n.pag. E-book.
- "Self Publishing, Book Printing and Publishing Online" *Lulu.com*. Web. 26 Mar. 2013.
- Senior, Antonia. "Ebook Sales Are Being Driven by Downmarket Genre Fiction." *The Guardian*. 6 Feb. 2012. Web. 19 Sep. 2012
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. 1818. Charlottesville, Va: U of Virginia Library, 1996. Print.

“Steampunk Links and Resources.” *Tor.com*. 9 Dec. 2010. Web. 26 Apr. 2014.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897. Charlottesville, Va: U of Virginia Library, 1996. Print.

Sutherland, John. *Bestsellers: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

Thompson, John B. *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Plume, 2012. Print.

Taddeo, Julie Anne, and Cynthia J Miller. *Steaming into A Victorian Future: A Steampunk Anthology*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. Print.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975. Print.

Vandermeer, Jeff. “Steampunk: Looking at The Evidence.” *Steaming into a Victorian Future*. Ed. Julie Taddeo and Cynthia Miller. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. 299–301. Print.

Walker, Jennifer. “How to Cosplay Steampunk.” *eHow*. Web. 22 Sep 2012.

Westerfeld, Scott, and Keith Thompson. *Leviathan*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2009. Print.

Wilson, Katherine. “Steampunk.” *Meanjin* 69. 2 (2010): 20–33 Print.

Wilson, Mark. “What Does ‘Science Fiction’ Really Mean?” *About.com Entertainment*. Web. 5 May 2015.

Wolfe, Gary K. *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan UP, 2011. Print